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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[GEORGIE WEPT AND SOBBED AND CLUNG TO PETER BLAINE AS IF SHE WERE PARTING WITH THE VERY LIGHT OF LIFE.]

TWO MARRIAGES.

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CHAPTER IV.

MARRIAGE had been in this state for nearly a month; and Peter, despite of his father, remained at home far beyond the allotted period, but the old gentleman was not to be befuddled. He did not intend to allow his able-bodied son to live on him any longer, and a stormy interview one evening after dinner culminated in a fortnight's notice to quit.

The next morning found Peter at the villa, interviewing Georgie in the garden alone.

In a voice trembling with feigned emotion he gave her a very exaggerated description of the scene, and told her that his unnatural parent had turned him out-of-doors; that he was going to America, when she would soon forget him, and marry someone else. In short, he worked upon her feelings very successfully, and reduced her to a state of the most abject woe; and then he told her to dry her eyes, put on her hat, and walk with him into

the town of Portsmouth, and would tell her what he proposed doing *en route*.

Charlotte was out. Mrs. Grey had no objection to Georgie going for a walk with Mr. Blaine; and soon the couple started, and they had not proceeded far when Mr. Peter discussed his scheme.

"You say you will be constant to me, Georgie? Words are cheap. I prefer deeds. How can I tell what may happen before I have even landed in New York? Women are all fickle. Perhaps in six months' time you will be married to another fellow, and cutting me in the street!"

"Oh, Peter! how can you?" she protested, with quivering lips.

"Then will you prove your love by a test, Georgie?"

"Yes, gladly. Need you ask?"

"Then marry me before I sail!"

Georgie suddenly stopped on the pavement, and looked at her companion with parted lips and incredulous eyes.

"You need not be alarmed. I don't want you to rough it in the States; it will just be a mere matter of form, just to bind you to me,

and no one else—just to ease my mind. I sail this day fortnight. The day I sail, if you consent, we will be married at the registry office, and you will be secretly my wife! And I shall have secured the eighty thousand pounds," thought Peter to himself. "It cannot escape me then."

The suggestion was a shock to Georgie, but her clever companion soon talked her out of all her scruples; and within half-an-hour she found herself inside a registry-office at Portsmouth, standing shyly in the background; whilst Peter, the persuasive, gave formal notice for the marriage of Peter Blaine and Georgina Grey that day fortnight.

The announcement was actually affixed to a board outside the door in the public street; but her fiancé reassured Georgie that no one they knew would be likely to come that way. They were quite safe, and on no account was she to tell her mother. This was the text of his conversation nearly the whole way home; and Georgie, who was as much under his influence as if he had mesmerized her, agreed to his wishes.

That night he wrote to Mrs. Bint, and told

her of the step he had taken, and requested the loan of fifty pounds, to be repaid with interest out of the legacy.

Mrs. Baint responded with only half that sum, and with a long epistle full of warnings, cautions, and advice, and a certain amount of sisterly approval of his proceedings thus far.

Charlotte Grey heard of the approaching departure of the fascinating Peter with grief and dismay (but what was her grief in comparison to George's?). She was amazed and disappointed that he had not spoken, and positively hoped against hope up to the very last minute, which shows how well and how artfully Mr. Blaine had played his cards.

She never for a moment suspected that he had paid any attention to her sister, save such as he would bestow upon a child, and she looked upon George as nothing more.

The day of departure came, and in the morning, George, making some vague excuse, left home immediately after breakfast ostensibly for Southsea and shopping in reality for Portsmouth and marriage.

Peter met her at a certain rendezvous, and together they walked to the office; and there, with the door wide open, and with two passers by as witnesses, brought in casually for the occasion, they were made man and wife. A ring was placed on George's finger, and she returned home no longer Miss Grey, but Mrs. Blaine.

She could not believe it, when she had hidden her ring (in her purse) and taken leave of her husband at the garden-gate. She felt that what had happened was hardly a reality as she entered their own modest domicile, and was imperiously called to by her sister to "come at once—where on earth had she been all the morning?—and help her to wash up the drawing-room ornaments." It was the day of a general cleaning and dusting of that apartment.

She found Charlotte in the china pantry, in a very big apron, and not in the very best of tempers, washing and drying the precious Indian, old Chelsea, and crown Derby china.

"Here, take off your hat and gloves," she said, sharply, "and dry these things! What have you been doing? How could you stay out so long when you knew this was the day we always turn out the drawing-room?"

George removed her hat and jacket, and muttered something incoherent, but intended as an apology, as she began to take her share of her sister's occupation with assumed alacrity.

"Did you see Peter Blaine?" asked Lottie, abruptly, as she rinsed out an old punch bowl.

"Did you meet him this morning?"

George merely nodded her head.

"He did not say anything about coming down, did he?"

Again a shake of the head.

"But of course he will—he will come to say good-bye. I know he goes by the mail this evening. What an old wretch Captain Blaine is to treat his only son in such a way! What a hard-hearted, wicked old man!—as bad as our Uncle George. There is one thing I want to ask you, George. You must have remarked—and you are not nearly so young and silly as you look—how very attentive Peter has been to me. He has even been civil to you because you are my sister. I have seen it myself. Now, when he comes to say good-bye to-night do you efface yourself as soon as possible, and leave Peter and me to make our adieu alone. I know he has something to say to me—something particular. Do you understand? I can tell you that I am frightfully cut up at his going away."

Miss Grey was so absorbed in her own woes and her own anticipations that she never noticed her companion's quivering lips and shaking hands.

Strange that this worthless Peter should ever make such a favourable impression on the fair sex, whilst they shunned and scorned better but plainer men!

Crash on the stone flags went a lovely

crown Derby jug that had slipped almost like a living thing from George's shaking, nerveless hands.

And the sister's torrent of bitter reproach was the only thing that saved her from betraying herself and bursting out crying at the very idea of Peter's departure.

Peter came down, and, thanks to her manoeuvres, had a *à tête-à-tête* interview with Charlotte; but although she wore her most becoming evening dress, and was tender and tearful, he never spoke one significant or hopeful word.

George bade him good-bye (a company good-bye) before her mother and sister, and one of another fashion later on, when she rushed out into the garden in the dark, and there bade him a real and most heartrending farewell.

She wept and sobbed and clung to him like the silly young creature of seventeen that she was, and as if she were parting with the very light of her life.

Once this emotional scene was over and he had torn himself away, murmuring promises of constant—constant letters, he felt a great sense of relief. That part of the play was over, thank goodness, and acting the rôle of Romeo was a severe strain upon this wolf in sheep's clothing, who did not care one single fig if he never saw Juliet again! All he wanted was her money; but poor Juliet did not know this, and went about her ordinary avocations in a heartbroken fashion, sobbing her red eyes and dull spirits to a bad cold.

She was always first down; her mother breakfasted in bed, and her sister was not an early bird, so she had the privilege of opening the letter-box and taking out the letters.

How her heart leaped when she first saw one directed to her in Peter's handwriting! How she glanced over her treasure—how she lived on it for days! Not that it was either very tender, or very loving, but her warm, youthful, imagination supplied all deficiencies.

She, on her part, wrote sheets, and sheets, and sheets, which he barely glanced over, and then consigned to the flames. Indeed, latterly he scarcely took the trouble to read them through, but just destroyed them as they came. He would not be bothered with this girl's foolish manderings all about him and her, and love, and constancy, and her mother's health, &c. If there had been a line or two about her Uncle George that would have been another affair.

His own effusions were short, and not very frequent. How George looked for them!—how she counted the days from mail to mail, the hours once that mail came! How she trembled when she heard the postman knock, and snatched the letters ere he had barely reached the door! Often she was disappointed, and she could not speak to relieve her mind; and this disappointment, and the burden of her secret, lay like lead upon her spirits.

Charlotte had found another admirer, and had forgotten Peter. Mary Blaine was going to be married. It was not unlikely that there would be a wedding from the villa too; and at the end of the year succeeding Mr. Blaine's departure there was a double event as predicted.

Mary married an elderly naval doctor, and Charlotte became the bride of an Australian sheep-farmer, who had come home to see the old country and look for a wife, and found one to suit him in Miss Charlotte Gray.

Then George was left alone, to look after her mother, who had become more and more of an invalid.

She caught a cold at her daughter's wedding, and the result was that she was confined to her bed for the whole of the winter.

This was dreary work for George. Her only visitor was Grace, who often came down to enliven her, and bring her books and flowers, and insisted on her going out and taking her place in the sick-room occasionally. She noticed that her friend was in desperately low spirits, and vainly tried to rouse her; she also noted that she made constant but circuitous inquiries for her brother Peter. Why was

this? She hinted her surprise one evening, as they were sitting together over the dining-room fire, in the twilight, alone.

"You are always so interested in Peter, you funny girl; and yet you and he were never such great friends. If it was any one it was Charlotte, but Peter cares for no one but himself. He has amused himself with dozens of love affairs, but soon tired of them. He has no heart."

"Oh! don't say that, Grace!" said her friend, shading her eyes with her hand; "I know you are wrong; it is not true."

"Nonsense, my dear!" taking up the poker and giving the coals an upheaving, "how can you tell half as well as his own sister, who is well acquainted with his character? I hope you have not been so silly as to believe any of the sweet speeches he may have made you?"

"Oh, Grace!" returned her companion, now sliding suddenly off her chair and burying her face in that young lady's lap. "I must—must tell you something; I cannot keep it to myself any longer. It will kill me, this secret; and I have not heard from him for a whole year."

"What is your secret, you silly girl?" she said. "I'm sure I hope you have not been so foolish as to fall in love with Peter, and consented to be engaged to him?"

"I have done worse than that, Grace. Oh!" seizing her hand, "promise me, on your honour, to keep my secret. He would be so angry if he thought I told; but I must—must speak to someone, and who so fitting as his own sister?"

"Then, for goodness' sake, speak out, and don't keep me on tenter-hooks any longer, child. What is it—what is this wonderful secret?"

"I—I—oh, how can I tell you, I—" making a great effort, and looking up into Grace's face, which expressed nothing more than half-amused toleration.

An exchange of kisses and locks of hair was the furthest her imagination could carry that young lady.

"I am married to your brother Peter!"

Clang down fell the poker, and Miss Grey sprang from her chair as if she had been shot, now by far the most moved of the two.

She leant her arm against the mantelpiece to steady herself for some seconds.

As she turned and looked back at the girl, still kneeling on the floor, her throat was working; she could not speak for some seconds, and then she said,—

"You are not in earnest, George? Oh, say you are not in earnest!" And to herself, "He could not—oh, he dared not!"

"I am, indeed, in earnest," said the other, rising, and now speaking with some self-control. "We were married at the registry office the day he sailed. We did it so that we should always be bound to one another, and could never drift apart."

"You foolish girl, you mad girl! And you believe in Peter!" exclaimed Grace, in a horrified voice.

"I do most sincerely, and I will not hear a word said against him! Only, Grace, do try and find out where he is—if he is well or ill! I will go on my knees to you for one word—only one!"

"He never writes unless he wants something," said Grace, sharply. "and never to me. What was his object?" she muttered, half to herself. "What, what could it have been? Not beauty, then—not money. For once Peter has puzzled me; and, oh, of all his wicked deeds none were so inexcusable as this! What motive can he have for spoiling her life?"

Outwardly his sister was silent. She looked as if she had received a great shock.

She stared helplessly at George—now her sister-in-law—as if she were seeking to find the answer to the question in her face—Why had he done it?

George was a raw, thin, shynessful girl a year and a half ago.

Her looks could not have been the attraction. She was much improved since then.

It was simply a wanton deed of wickedness to tie this girl to him for life, and then abandon her, as it were, for sport.

"You must take your mother into your confidence, Georgie," she said, impressively. "I wonder you did not do so long ago. She should have been the first to hear of this."

"I would have done so, but he expressly forbade me. I dare not; and you are his sister. He would not be so angry about your being told as anyone else."

"Angry!" "Dare!"

This was a curious way of alluding to the abstract, seeing that he was supposed to be still her lover; but Peter ruled with an iron hand, and as much by fear as love.

"Be advised by me, and tell your mother this very night, before you go to sleep," said Grace, with unusual solemnity. "She and I will keep your secret for you, you poor deluded Georgie. Although I say it, if my own brother," she added, quickly resuming her hat and fur-lined cloak and waving away her companion with an abrupt farewell—as abruptly took her departure, leaving Georgie sitting at the fire alone.

Georgie acted on her advice at once. Now that the ice had once been broken it seemed easier to speak, and she very gently led her mother round to the subject of Peter Blaine.

Mrs. Grey—dear, unsophisticated woman!—had a high opinion of this very attentive and gentlemanly young man, and praised him, and spoke of him in a far warmer manner than his own sister.

Ere her praises had died away from her lips Georgie had mustered up courage.

"Would you be very angry and very much shocked, mother?" taking her hand as she spoke. "Indeed, indeed, I am afraid you will; but I could not help it. He would not let me speak. Before Peter went away that February day eighteen months ago I walked into Portsmouth, and married him at the registry office."

Mrs. Grey fairly gasped, and no wonder! She was so stunned by this startling communication that she could not speak until she had her lips moistened by a glass of old port wine, and then all she said was,—

"Oh, Georgie, Georgie!"

"Be angry with me as much as you please, mother; I deserve it. I know I am older and wiser now; and, much as I love Peter, you ought to have been told first."

"And why was I not? Why this long secrecy?"

"Peter said you would not hear of my marrying a poor man like him, or even being engaged. He is so firm and so resolute in his own opinion that he will listen to no other; and, to keep me true to him until he came back with a fortune and claimed me, he said it was best to go through the form of a secret marriage; but, oh! mother, mother, I have not heard from him for a year, and I fear that he is dead!" now breaking down and sobbing bitterly.

"If he were, surely Mr. Blaine would know, dear. All news always travels fast. He may be in the wilds, his letters stolen or lost. After all, Georgie, though you might have trusted me, I am not so angry as I ought to be, or as your aunt Vance would be were you her daughter. I am not going to be with you long. Charlotte is at the other end of the world. You need a protector. You would be truly alone, poor child; and though I cannot understand his doubts of my consent—for surely he has something?—I will die easier in my mind knowing you to be the wife of such a steady, worthy young man (as far as I know) as Peter Blaine."

CHAPTER V.

Very soon after this a letter did come from America in Mr. Blaine's own neat handwriting, but it was scarcely one that Georgie cared to lay before her mother or his sister.

It was an imperative demand for money—money at once, money at any price.

Poor Georgie! Her cheeks burned as she read this long-looked-for epistle, and she was extremely angry with herself for feeling that her idol was not made of pure gold, after all!

She told her mother and Grace that he was in New Orleans, well, but not doing well.

"You need hardly add that," exclaimed his sister, sharply. "Poor Georgie, you will get to know Peter by-and-by! You need not make excuses for him to me. The best thing he can do, as far as you are concerned, is to stay away always."

Here ensued an angry argument, Georgie stoutly defending her lord and master, and Grace as stoutly attacking her too well-known relative, though her charges were vague.

She did not, dared not, tell this girl before her what manner of man she had so blindly married.

Encouraged by the success of his appeal, the shameless Peter (who had swallowed up all his wife's boardings and her yearly allowance for dress) wrote again and again for money.

His cry was like that of the daughter of the horse-leech,—

"Give, give!"

His begging letters were masterpieces, and he always implied, in the midst of his most clamorous demands, that he was conferring a great favour upon her in permitting her to supply his wants.

Where to obtain this money Georgie knew not. She was positively at her wits' end, and Peter must have thirty pounds, for Peter was ill.

So he said, but in truth his illness was a fable, and he was trying his luck at euchre and poker at the low gambling places in New Orleans.

This was his profession. Since he had left England he had never attempted anything else.

At one time his luck was "dead in," and he spent his winnings lavishly on himself. At others he was living hand to mouth, and almost destitute.

He swayed backwards and forwards between money and no money with the regularity of a pendulum.

What would the trusting Georgie have said could she have seen him as she despatched the price of her watch and all her humble little ornaments across the Atlantic—to have had the gift of following that letter with her eye and seen it hastily torn open, cast aside unread, with a curse at the scantiness of its enclosure—to have seen her adored Peter seated at a table thronged with the very dregs of society, a beard on his face, a big Panama hat on his head, a revolver in his hand, and a heap of gold and dirty paper-money piled before him, gambling and drinking "the happy hours away?"

Oh! how he mentally smacked his lips as he thought of that big sum that would be his own some day, and some day soon—for Annie gave her brother very encouraging accounts of the failing health of old George Harvey—he could not possibly last much longer; in Mr. Blaine's opinion he had far outstayed his allotted time as it was.

Alas! for Mr. Blaine's hopes—for Mrs. Grey's modest expectations of a small remembrance for Georgie, who would be so badly off in the coming by-and-by.

Although Mr. Harvey died—and died suddenly, falling downstairs and breaking his aged neck—no will was to be found!

Mr. Bint had made one, and given it over to the old gentleman, who refused to trust it into any hands but his own—where had he put it?

Echo answered where!

Every nook and corner of the house was searched—Halliday foremost in the quest—but no last testament could be discovered.

Think of the blow that this was to the scheming Mrs. Bint, who knew that her

brother would now lay the blame of all his misfortunes at her doors—think of Peter's feelings when he received the terrible tidings of no will, and that Mrs. Vance had most cheerfully succeeded to the estate as elder sister and heir-at-law!

So he had had all that business for nothing?

He wrote one more arbitrary appeal for money to his partner, who had to have recourse to her mother, with many blushes and tears; and having succeeded in getting his demands supplied, he said to himself, as he cashed his last remittance,—

"I think I have about got all she has to give, and squeezed out every shilling, and now I'll cut her and the entire concern"—and he did.

For a whole year there were no tidings of him. At the end of that time Mrs. Grey, who had long been holding on to life just by a mere thread, died, leaving her daughter almost alone in the world, for the Greys were poor, proud, and reserved, especially since Charlotte (the sociable) had married; and, beyond the Blaines, had but few friends.

Mrs. Grey, with almost her last breath, commended Georgie to Grace, saying,—

"She is, as you know, your brother's wife: write to him and tell him to come home and take care of her; he need not be afraid of me now."

Grace nodded, and pressed the poor lady's hand reassuringly, and promised that whatever happened she would always be a sister to Georgie, and that she would never want for a friend as long as she lived; but she made no allusion to the absent Peter.

After the funeral Georgie was taken home by the Blaines, who were very good to her.

The furniture at the villa was sold by auction—the widow's little fortune arranged so that it came to Georgie—and all her affairs were wound up by Captain Blaine, who rather enjoyed financial business.

Georgie had barely forty pounds a year—for part of her mother's income had lapsed at her death, and she talked of going out as a companion if she could find any suitable situation with some nice invalid elderly lady.

The Blaines were much against this, and would have offered her a home, but they expected her aunt, the wealthy Mrs. Vance, to come forward and claim her niece; however, so far, beyond a letter of condolence, she had made no sign.

Georgie's mourning was still too recent for her to go anywhere or to see anyone, when another blow fell upon her.

She came downstairs one morning to breakfast, and ere she had passed the threshold of the dining-room door she was aware that something had happened.

Mrs. Blaine lay upon the sofa in a faint—Captain Blaine was walking the room, at a quarter deck, in a very perturbed state of mind; holding a letter behind his back—and Grace and a maid were trying to recover Mrs. Blaine. The breakfast was untouched—what had happened?

"Don't come in, Georgie!" cried Grace, with a gesture of dismissal. "Go into the drawing-room; I'll be with you in five minutes."

Thus imperatively sent away, Georgie did as she was told and went obediently, and waited in the next room.

She had not much time for speculation, for in less than the allotted five minutes Grace entered quickly, closed the door, walked up to her, and laid her hands on her shoulders and said,—

"It was best to tell you alone. Prepare for a shock—I bring you bad news."

"It—it is Peter!" gasped his wife, suddenly, sitting down and becoming very white, and shaking all over.

"Yes, it is Peter. Papa has been making inquiries about him. A letter came from his agents this morning."

"Is he dead?" inquired Georgie, in a low, horrified whisper.

"Yes," replied his sister, averting her eyes.

"Go on—go on; tell me all," adjured the other, excitedly. "Get it over quickly."

"There is no more—he was killed in a steamboat explosion nearly two months ago."

"Is—it is sure to be true?"

"Quite sure; there is no room for a doubt."

Strange to say, Georgie was not crying yet—her face was very rigid and very white—the blow was so sudden. She could not realise it all at once.

Her companion stared at her in some surprise and then said,—

"No one need ever know now, Georgie, about you and he. Don't think me a wretch for speaking of it now, but I implore you, in the most urgent manner, to keep the secret from everyone. I have a reason for this."

"I do not believe that he is dead," said Georgie, rising, and not noticing the request, "something tells me that he is alive."

"It is but too true," said Grace; "do not delude yourself with false hopes. Stay, you shall see the letter!"

In another moment she had hurried out of the room, and returned with it in her hand.

It was apparently from a firm of lawyers in St. Louis, and ran as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,—I am sorry to send you the painful intelligence that Mr. P. Blaine is no more. We, acting on instructions from your New York agents, succeeded in tracing him to New Orleans, to Little Rock, and other places. Within the last week he was one of the passengers on board the river steamer *Express*, which had a terrible accident, from over-pressure on the boilers, and more than forty passengers were killed. Mr. Blaine went on board—that has been sworn to—but he is not among the survivors. His luggage lies unclaimed. We shall forward it, if desired, on receipt of your favour. The barman of the *Express*, who lies in hospital badly scalded, has informed the interviewer that a gent, exactly answering to the description of Mr. P. Blaine, was the last passenger to whom he handed a gin-cocktail, and that he was so close to the boilers that he could not possibly escape."

"Permit me, dear sir, to conclude with sympathy and respect.—I remain, your obedient servant,

"ZACHARY B. SHARP."

This was conclusive even to Georgie, who was compelled to accept the situation, and was, as Mrs. Blaine remarked, "the most sympathetic girl she had ever met. She was really quite like one of themselves—she felt it so much for poor Peter."

Often it had been on the tip of Georgie's tongue to confide in his mother that she was poor Peter's widow, but a solemn promise to Grace withheld her.

She was already in deep-mourning, so she could not add that tribute to his memory; but she spent many hours alone in her own room, dissolved in tears over his photograph and brand-new, never-worn wedding ring.

CHAPTER VI.

Georgie's woe-begone appearance was all very well for a month or six weeks, but when time went on, and she still presented to the world a visage that looked as if it never would, could, or should smile again, Grace was out of all patience.

She did not know that what was secretly praying on her friend's mind was this—a sense of shame, of surprise, at herself, that she was not half as sorry as she ought to have been.

The late Peter's blunt, almost brutal letters had been a shock to his bride. There had been gradually an unavowed sense of something wanting stealing over her mental view of Mr. Bland, and a violent, almost agonised, struggle to keep fast hold of her reverence for him; but somehow, almost imperceptibly, it had slid away.

She tried to conjure up her first impressions, but they would not come; those fierce, curt letters, those long silences of utter indifference had done their part.

All the same, when Grace remonstrated with her for such apparently inconsolable grief—grief which time had done nothing to assuage—she became warm, nay, angry, in her own self-defence, and in doing valiant battle in the cause of Peter and his perfections.

"Georgie, I have no patience with you," said her friend at last. "Would you let the memory of him throw a cloud over all your life—you, who are only nineteen, with your best years before you? If you knew him you would not squander your time and your tears. If you had really known him you would never have married him, and why he married you I cannot understand."

"He married me because—because he loved me," returned Georgie, boldly, "for nothing else."

Her companion surveyed her for some moments in silence, and then said,—

"He never loved but one woman, and she was not you. He made love to scores, but the only one he ever really cared for was Mary Todd, a housemaid we had years ago—a very, very pretty girl. She was sent away when it was found out, and Peter was distracted. Yes, in his way, such as it was, he cared for Mary Todd, and for no one since."

"Grace, how dare you speak in this way of your brother!" stammered the young widow.

"It is shameful, unnatural, wicked!"

"I never cared for Peter," replied Grace, calmly, "and I am very fond of you, and I don't like to see you fretting for a will-o'-the-wisp, and going about with white cheeks and hollow eyes for the sake of one, who—; but never mind, I will say no more, I will leave it all to time. The only thing I ask of you is to give me your solemn promise, swear it to me, that to living soul you will never repeat that you listened to Peter and went through that form at the registry-office. I have a good reason for this. Here, give me your promise on this, Georgie," holding out small Testament as she spoke, "then I shall feel safe—then I shall feel as if the past was really buried."

"I do not see what wonderful interest you have in the matter, Grace—you who speak so harshly of your poor brother," objected Georgie. "What is it to you?"

"It is for your own sake I am asking for this promise, and some day you will understand that I have been wise. You are too young, and impetuous, and imprudent to understand it now; if your mother knew what was in my mind she would say the same. She would urge you to everlasting silence on this one subject," still holding out the book; and her friend, overawed by the solemnity of her manner and her persistent insistence, accepted it, kissed it, and gave the required promise, that would tie her tongue for evermore.

Peter's effects arrived in due time; they seemed a tangible proof that he was really dead. Very odd things were discovered in his travelling-bag and portmanteau—cards, dice, promissory notes, betting-books, and other volumes belonging to the very worst grade of literature.

These things were not kept back from Georgie; she saw them all. She saw sweet little notes in female handwriting alluding to meetings, and jaunts, and presents—presents bestowed on these strangers, perhaps with the very money he had wrung from her.

These letters went a long way towards curing Georgie of her fits of remorseful abstraction, and by-and-by she was sufficiently cheerful to pay a visit to Hillford to her wealthy relations, who had sent her more than one urgent invitation, pleasantly but cautiously worded, not committing themselves to offering her a permanent home, only speaking of a long stay.

The Vances had soared far above a neat

detached residence standing in its own grounds of half-an-acre (vide the advertisements), and had taken up their abode in a handsome mansion of the Queen Anne period, about a mile from the town. There they kept a great deal of company, entertaining the county and the nearest military, and had a retinue of servants, and not one, but three or four carriages.

Mr. Vance was a timid little gentleman, with a bald head, and did his best to stay in the background, with his paper, his pipe, and his prize tulips. They were his only extravagance, and Mrs. Vance and her daughters were now great people of fashion, and these plain (and we cannot add young) ladies had each an admirer—whether of themselves or their substantial fortunes we need not linger to inquire.

Georgie's rôle had been already arranged by them. It was to be that of the "poor relation"—not an agreeable part at any time, and specially galling to Georgie, who was both proud and shy. She had not seen her aunt and cousins for more than three years, and during that time she had shot up from a thin, angular, unformed child of sixteen into a very elegant looking, tall, and strikingly pretty girl of nineteen. She arrived at Hillford station one wet May afternoon, and looked out in vain on the platform for a familiar face—none such to be seen! She descended, secured her luggage, and looked round more leisurely. No one accosted her; no one had wanted her. Then the train went on, and she was left a lonely figure, standing beside her belongings on the platform. This was certainly a very chill kind of welcome.

Just as she was about to charter a fly a man in livery came up to her, streaming with rain—it was now pouring—and said, as he touched his hat,—

"Are you Miss Grey, please?"

"Yes," she assented, most gladly.

"I'm come from Bosworth Hall for you—Mrs. Vance's. I've got the pony Croydon outside. Your luggage will fit all right," and it did; and in a few minutes they had started in sheets of rain, in this little open trap, and were rapidly trotting out of the town, and not long in reaching their destination, through a pair of great gates, up an avenue bordered with dripping laurels, to the hall door of a big, old red house. The hall door was thrown open by a smart footman, and Georgie entered, but there was no one to greet her even here.

"Please, miss, will you walk into the drawing-room," said the servant, "and I'll tell Mrs. Vance."

The drawing-room—a big, cold-looking room, newly decorated with white and grey—was also empty; and Georgie, who was tired and hungry and wet, felt, as she sat waiting for someone to welcome her, ready to burst into tears, and a foolish desire to go back by the next available train to her kind hospitable friends, the Blaines. Very different was their treatment to this.

Presently the door opened, and Mr. Vance hobbled in, newspaper in hand and spectacles on nose.

"Well, Georgie," he exclaimed in a chirruping kind of voice, "so you have come, eh? What, got wet, I'm afraid? Your aunt and cousins have gone to an afternoon tea, and took the close carriage, or they'd have been here to meet you. They said you would not mind, and sent Jones and the Croydon. Eh?—what?"

Georgie made no reply. What could she say?

"I suppose you would like tea and to see your room, eh? Dear me, you are greatly grown—eh—what?" as she stood up, "quite—quite a fine-looking young woman," casting a mental glance at his own ill-favoured daughters. "Here, Johnson," to a maid who had approached, "take Miss Grey upstairs; get her tea, show her her room, and look after her. Your aunt," turning to Georgie, "will

be home about seven. You'd, perhaps, better be down by then. Eh—what?"

This was an inversion of the laws of etiquette with a vengeance. She was to receive and welcome her relations, not they her. So saying he hobbled away to his own study.

The room selected for Georgie was at the top of the house—up three flights of stairs. It was not luxurious, and by no means one of the grand guest-chambers; but it was comfortable, and she felt more at home when she had unpacked some of her luggage, changed her dress, and partaken of some very refreshing tea, and an accompanying plate of buttered toast. She was ready now to face her relations when they arrived; but their unceremonious treatment of her filled her with some misgiving.

She tried to think as well of them as she could; she remembered that Lizzie and Jane were a good deal older than she was. They had always treated her quite as a child, and made her run their errands and messages, lectured her, patronised her, even after she had gone into long dresses. They still called her "that child." What would they say to her now? How would they treat her? Certainly no longer as a little girl in the schoolroom. Probably they had all forgotten that she was now quite grown up, and this was the reason that they had not thought it necessary to make any fuss about her.

As the clock on the mantelpiece neared seven she began to think it was time to go downstairs.

She rose and looked at herself in the glass. She had on a very plain, well-made black dress, and looked imposingly tall in the long mirror that gave back her reflection.

She wondered what her relations would say to her; and as she was longing to get the meeting over she went slowly downstairs.

Just as she reached the inner hall there was a great fuss in the outer one, several female voices talking at once, and the loudest saying—

"Oh! she has come, has she!"

Then the "jiving door" was thrown back, and she was face to face with a tall lady with a beaky nose, and two splendidly-dressed smaller ones—her aunt and cousins. And they were confronted, not by what they expected in the least—a rather countrified, gawky, commonplace girl—but a very tall, very pretty young lady in mourning, who must be their cousin Georgie; and who, as she advanced to meet them, gave them almost the idea of receiving them in their own house.

This was no girl to be patronised or scubbed, and certainly no girl to bring among their own circle of admirers.

Very voluble were their excuses, and they made up for their social slackness previously, but overpowering familiarity in the present.

They brought Georgie into the morning-room, and all then sat down and inspected her as she stood under the gaslight.

"How you have grown, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Vance, unfastening her mantle as she spoke. "Out of all recollection, I declare!"

"Yes, she is not the least the style of girl she promised to be," chimed in Lizzie, with a dubious tone of voice.

"And her hair being tied up makes a difference," added Jane.

"Well," remarked Georgie, now taking a seat, "you all look much the same as when I saw you last—only older (meaning no offence)—resolved not to sit by dumb, as if she was some piece of furniture they were dismissing.

"Three years can't make any difference in looks at our age! To listen to you one would imagine we were old women!" said Lizzie, sharply; adding, "you are still in deep crepe, I see. Who made your dress? Jay?"

"No; it was made at Southsea."

"It's a capital one—is it not, Lizzie?" appealing to her sister.

"Well, my dear," interrupted her aunt, "that was a sad business about your poor mother. But she was always an invalid. I

never expected she would have held out so long. And Charlotte is married. Great changes. And we have had our changes, too," now looking round the luxurious apartment complacently. "We are quite in the county set. Your Uncle George's money came to me, you know?"

"Yes; I know," assented Georgie, quietly.

"So strange that he made no will. There was some cock-and-a-bull story going about, set rolling by the Bints, that he had made a will, and left all his fortune to you—of all people! Did you ever hear of such an absurd idea in all your life? I laughed till I cried when they told me."

Georgie muttered indistinctly that it was an absurd idea, and then Jane burst out,—

"Did you hear that he was found at the bottom of the stairs with a broken neck. Fancy his dying in that way! They say, of course, the house is haunted. No one will take it, and so it's given up to the rats."

"What has become of Halliday?" said Georgie.

"Oh! Halliday was fearfully out up about the will. She expected a fine legacy; and she hunted the whole house most carefully from garret to cellar, turned out every nook and cranny, all in vain. However, she must have feathered her nest pretty well, all the same, for she has married a man young enough to be her son, who, of course, married her for her money; and she has money, for she has taken the lease of the 'Plough and Harrow' public house, and stocked it and furnished it, and does a fine trade."

"And is one of her own best customers, if tales be true," remarked Jane, with a spiteful little laugh. "They say she drinks like a fish."

"Well, girls, there's the first gong; we must go and dress," said Mrs. Vance, rising. "You know your way to the drawing-room, Georgina. You see, we do not make any stranger of you, and we shall expect you to make yourself quite at home—blood is thicker than water," patting her on the arm.

All the same, as the two Miss Vances were dressing they frankly compared notes, and came to the conclusion that Georgie Grey was not the least like what they expected, and they were rather sorry that she had been asked to Bosworth Hall.

Time went on, and Georgie shook down into a certain groove in the family circle.

She did not go "out" with her aunt and cousins, as the former, under pressure from her daughters, declared that her mother being dead only seven months such a proceeding was not to be thought of, even in the mildest form; and when more than one or two people dined at Mrs. Vance's Georgie partook of that meal alone in the retirement of the school-room.

People who saw her were rather astonished to find that commonplace Mrs. Vance possessed such an elegant, distinguished-looking relative—these were the county folk.

In the town of Hillford she saw many familiar faces, and received for her own and her mother's sake a hearty welcome in an humbler sphere.

One day she actually met Halliday in the street when she was alone—Halliday, who was not drunk. Oh! dear, no, but loquacious and outspoken. She paused exactly in front of her, and said,—

"Well, unless I'm blind, 'tis Mrs. Grey's youngest!"

"Yes; and you are Halliday, Uncle Grey's housekeeper, returned the young lady, promptly. "Poor old man, he had a sad end!"

"He had; but 'twas an easy death," and lowering her voice and glancing into Georgie's rather-startled face. "Believe me, as I stand here, that will will be found, and someone as I could mention will be righted yet; and those as is flaunting about in peacocks' feathers, as has no right to them, will find their level. You mark my words," and with a sudden change of tone, as if sorry she had let herself

say so much, she added, "well, I'm glad to see you. You're a lady, whatever other people may be. Good morning to you, miss," and with a nod of her head she passed on, walking, perhaps, not quite as straight or as steady as she would have wished had she seen herself as others saw her.

I have wandered from the point in enlarging on Halliday and her little weakness, and that point was Georgie's position in her aunt's household.

She was not exactly an humble retainer, and yet she was not an honoured guest. She had no wish for fine society, for balls, for dinner-parties; but she could see that even if she had it would have been all the same.

She was to stay in the background when visitors called. She was never summoned when these visits were returned; she was left at home. She was sent all the messages, as of yore—all the errands into Hillford; and when alone with aunt and cousins they were more than amiable, they were positively gushing; and it was "Georgie, dear," this, and "Georgie, my love," that.

Georgie made bouquets—arranged flowers, Georgie—oh, joy! was very clever with her needle.

She could put a hat or bonnet together like magic; could make a bow or trim a dress with a taste and readiness that surprised her delighted relations, and that quite superseded their forty-guinea maid. Besides this she played very well, and had a good voice, and "coached" them up in the little ditties they sang when they were at parties; patiently going over and over the same bars again. In short, as a lady-companion, superior class of maid, she was a treasure.

She answered notes; she received confidences; she advised about dress, and this was all very well for the present. But how would it be in the coming by-and-by, when she went out too, and appeared as a rival in the matrimonial market? It would not be so pleasant at all; already she had been "noticed."

She had been seen in church and elsewhere, and people had begun to make eager inquiries about "their pretty cousin, Miss Grey"—notably, Lizzie's own and only admirer, although Lizzie had impressed upon him that they had her with them out of charity; that she was absolutely without a penny. Still he was interested—odious, fickle man!

It was ungrateful of Lizzie and untruthful, too, to speak of her relations in these terms, for Georgie had, as we know, forty pounds of her own per annum, and she was worth nearly as much more to her cousins as a kind of white slave; for what she had once begun to undertake, out of pure good nature, they now looked for as a matter of course and an absolute right, and actually grudging any time she might spend on her own gratification—reading, practising, or taking a country walk.

Mrs. Vance saw this. She was not quite so grasping and hard as her daughters, and Georgie was her sister's child. Sometimes she playfully remarked,—

"Girls, you really must not put upon Georgie. She is too good-natured; that's the second dress she has taken to pieces and altered this week."

This was her only remonstrance, as Georgie bent over her work with aching back and tired eyes, and Lizzie would reply with easy serenity,—

"Oh! Georgie does not go out herself. She has great taste and nothing to do, and she likes it. Don't you, dear?"

Then Georgie would mutter something incoherent, and Jane would add,—

"It's much pleasanter for Georgie to be here with us—her own people—one of the family, than if she was earning her own bread out in the world as governess or companion; and, after all, sewing is easy!"

Sometimes Georgie thought that after all she would prefer to be a governess or companion; she could not be harder worked, and she would be quite independent. Her mind

hovered round this idea for some time, and at last came to a resolute conclusion, to which she was helped by accidentally overhearing the following conversation between her amiable cousins.

She was sitting at her open window sewing, one broiling afternoon, about four o'clock. Their bower was just beneath, and they were apparently sitting at the window discussing some one. It never dawned upon her at first that it could be her, and she listened quite unintentionally.

"I wish she was gone; she will give us trouble yet," said Jane; "she has been here six months now—nearly seven."

"Yes!" acquiesced her sister, "and mother declares that next month she must begin to take her out." (Georgie pricked up her ears; then they were not talking of a servant.) "People, she says, are already beginning to notice, and ask, and wonder when our pretty cousin is going to make her appearance in society."

"And when she does," interrupted her companion, "you and I may retire. She is pretty, there's no denying it, though I don't admire the style, and young; and men are such geese, so easily attracted by a young and pretty face, instead of solid worth and money" (meaning herself). "You know, frankly between ourselves, you and I will never see thirty again."

"You need not remind me of that," quoth the other, sharply, "though I consider that at thirty-five a woman, like a man, is in her prime. The thing is, how are we to get rid of her? What a nuisance she will be taking out. There will be her clothes, her seat in the carriage; four is an awful crush, and four women are too many anywhere, and it can scarcely be expected that one of us should stop at home."

"Scarcely, indeed!" snapped her sister; "I won't for one."

"She is all very well now, and useful, but once she is brought out in society and placed on the same footing as ourselves it will be simply insupportable. I won't stand it, and I shall tell mother so; she has been here six months as it is, quite a long enough visit. Why should she not go back to those friends of hers, the Blaines? I shall throw out a few hints in that direction, you see if I don't," impressively.

But no hints would be needed. The unwell-come cousin, who was busy stitching for that very lady's benefit, had already heard, with crimson face and throbbing heart, she was not wanted—no other hint would be necessary. She would go, and as soon as possible, but to where? Why should she return to the Blaines, upon whom she had no claim? What on earth was she to do? She rested her burning head on her hands and asked herself that question, and assured herself that wherever she went, or whatever became of her, she would not remain here.

(To be continued.)

THE chiming of some particular words in the memory, and making a noise in the head, seldom happens but when the mind is lazy, or very loosely or negligently employed.

MEMORY.—Just as any weak organ of the body may be improved by exercise and culture, so may the memory. One method of cultivating the memory is to see to it that the impressions received are properly and truly registered and repeated until they become familiar, and, so to speak, a part of the brain structure. Another is to be careful and not register impressions which are valueless, and thus lumber up the mind with useless trash, but to judiciously forget what is not essential. Forgetfulness is essential to remembering. We do not store up the unsound, but cast it away as soon as we can; and so we should cast away the useless ideas that come and go in our active life.

LET'S BE HAPPY WHILE WE MAY.

WHAT'S the use of meeting trouble
On its dark and dreary way?
It will find us all too quickly—
Let's forget it while we may.
Let us look about our pathway
At the good things scattered there;
And, if we'll examine closely,
We will find a gen'rous share.

While the sun's about our pathway,
Let's enjoy his warmth and light
Basking in the golden sunbeams,
Ere they lose themselves in night.
While the roses bloom around us,
Let us gather all we may,
And enjoy their bloom and fragrance,
Ere their beauty fades away.

Why sit down and sadly ponder
On the trials that may come?
To be sure we know some trouble
Visits every hearth and home.
Still, why grieve and worry o'er them
If they have not entered yet?
When we see them at the threshold,
Then is time enough to fret.

When they come don't lose your courage;
Look at them through cheerful eyes.
'Tis the dread anticipation
That gives troubles half their size.
And we'll often find them dwindle
'Neath a sunny, cheerful smile.
Oh, don't let us fret and worry—
'Tis not really worth the while!

K. O.

MADLINE GRANT.

CHAPTER XLI.

MARRIAGE was gradually coming to a crisis at Dunkern. Things (as the Americans would say) had been "working round" for some time past.

Miss Blunt's envy and affronted vanity was smouldering, and ready to blaze out at the smallest provocation. It only needed a letter, now on its way to her, to transform her into a social firebrand, and to enable her to set everyone in the company by the ears.

Then Mr. Glyn was human, and although he had done with Madeline in theory, in reality he was very fond of her still; and although he looked back upon little Harry's deathbed with bitterness when he thought of her absence, yet he was inclined to soften down her failings; consequently in his own mind he had an inward conviction that Madeline was penitent, and was anxious to make amends for the past if he would meet her half-way with a flag of truce.

A look, a word, had dropped from her occasionally that served as straws to show which way the current was setting.

He was relenting a little. Yes, he felt that he was only punishing himself as well as her. He would go to Mr. Grant, who was most partial, most amazingly benevolent to him; tell him, in as well chosen words as he could, the plain truth, and claim his daughter as his wife!

This scheme had been on the eve of being carried out when Lord Robert arrived, and everything was changed.

He naturally looked at the intimacy between him and Madeline with disgust, contempt, incredulity, and suppressed fury.

What had he to say to her so often in confidence? How dare he whisper to her, sit beside her, bend over her, loiter behind with her coming home from shooting? What did it mean? And she did not snub him; she accepted the situation, and lent him her company and her ear. What was the clue to this? Was it possible that she was in love

with this cynical-looking, crafty, sandy-haired rascal. But no, he did not think so badly of her as that.

The same evening that they had been relating ghost stories he found himself in the library alone. There was reel-dancing in the big hall, but the fun was too fast and too furious to suit his present frame of mind. He did not affect the pipes nor the national dance, and he strolled into the big, empty library and read the papers. Then he went over and pulled aside the curtains and looked out.

It was a bright moonlight night, frosty and clear; the castle was casting a great black shadow across the lawn, and beyond that all looked as bright as day.

He leant his arms on the window-ledge, and stood for a long—time not really looking at the scene, but wrapt in thought.

He must return to town in a day or two at farthest, and before he went he must have a word with Madeline, and, perhaps, with her father, even although she paraded as Miss Grant.

He had given her leave to do so. It passed all human forbearance that she should so entirely forget what was due to Mrs. Glyn—should allow this insidious, needy reprobate to whisper in her ear and to gaze in her eyes as if she was free—as if she did not, in reality, belong to him—Hugh Glyn, who had to stand aside and restrain many a fierce impulse to take Lord Robert by the throat and choke him.

He was standing in the shadow of the curtain when, at this instant, the two people of whom he was thinking came quickly into the room—the room dimly lit by one reading-lamp and the fire. They did not notice him; and Madeline, who was still slightly breathless, and had evidently been dancing, cast herself into a low armchair, and said, as she began to wield her fan,—

"Well, here I am! I have kept the tryst. What is it?" rather irritably.

"You can guess," said her companion, seating himself more deliberately with his back to Hugh.

"Oh!"—scornfully—"the old thing—money?"

"You have hit it, Miss Grant, with your usual intelligence."

"And how much this time?"

"Another thousand," crossing his legs coolly as he spoke.

"Another thousand! Heaven and earth! You must be mad to ask for it. One would imagine that a thousand pounds was as easily procured as half-a-crown. You have had more than half my yearly allowance as it is, and so many of my diamonds that my father begins to be suspicious. I cannot possibly let you have a thousand pounds, or anything like it."

"Your father is reputed to have thirty thousand a-year. It's a fleabite to him, my dear, and you must get it by hook or by crook. A young lady who has managed to hoodwink him so completely for years can surely contrive to get this little advance. I've been uncommonly hard hit over racing this season, and money I must have, or I shall be posted. You, perhaps, don't know what that means? But sooner than that should happen I should be obliged to have recourse to my very last card, one I do not wish to play, unless you force my hand."

"And, pray, what is that card?" inquired Madeline, shortly.

"To sell my secret—our secret—to your guileless parent."

"Our secret! Oh! what folly, what madness ever tempted me to entrust it to a wretch like you! Have I not your solemn promise—"

"My promise must occasionally be foregone."

"You have the baseness to say so! Have I not stopped your mouth over and over again with money?"

The feelings of Hugh Glyn as he listened to

this conversation may be better imagined than described.

He had tried to speak more than once, but he had been literally petrified by what he heard.

He looked at Madeline, he looked at her colleague—Madeline, cold and scornful now; the other, bargaining, like the basest of villains that he was!

What was their secret? He would wring it from the scoundrel's lips.

Needless to say that both started when Mr. Glyn came suddenly and stood on the hearth-rug between them.

They had no idea that he had been a listener. The library carpet was a thick, soft Turkey—footfalls died away on it.

He had just arrived, of course, and, quickly recovering their self-command, they looked at him suspiciously in silence for a moment.

"How you startled us, Glyn! You come in like one of the ghosts we were hearing about," said Lord Robert. "Miss Grant and I came in here to rest for a few moments away from those insatiable dancers outside and those frantic pipes."

"I think I should tell you that I have been here all the time," returned the other, leaning against the mantelpiece to steady himself as he spoke, and speaking in a strange, repressed voice.

Lord Robert showed unmistakable signs of astonishment and discomfiture, and there were some seconds of an awkward pause. Then Hugh spoke again.

"You and Miss Grant possess a secret in common, apparently, and your price is a thousand pounds. Supposing"—not once looking at Madeline—"that! you sell it to me?"

Lord Robert looked at him sharply. Loathing contempt and instinctive dislike revealed themselves plainly in Mr. Glyn's look and speech. Then he said,—

"Twelve hundred, if you like."

"It would be of no use to you," he said, with a lowering brow. "Miss Grant's father will find it worth having; he is my market!"

"Whether he is or not, you will tell it to me before you leave this room!" said Hugh, fiercely, "or you don't leave it alive!"

"My good man, don't excite yourself! What on earth have you to say to me or to Miss Grant and her affairs? This much you may know—her secret concerns another man, presumably young—eh, Miss Grant, and good-looking? In short, her lover!"

Hugh literally quivered with suppressed fury. He turned and looked at Madeline for the first time, and there was a flash in his eye that fairly frightened her.

"Hugh," she said, springing up quickly, and placing her hand on his arm, "do not look at me like that; do not dare to do it," speaking in short gasps, her heart was beating so quickly. "It—it is our secret that is in possession of this wretch. He is the only one that knows it," pointing a trembling finger at Lord Robert, as he spoke.

"He knows it, and how?"

"I was forced to tell him. He tried to carry me off, to elope with me, against my will last year, from a picnic. He pretended the horse was lame; he took me to a farmhouse, thinking to compromise me; and then I was forced to tell him all, and to bribe him heavily to silence. He has been a nightmare to me ever since," speaking passionately out of a full heart. "He has forced me to be civil to him, when he knows that I loathe him—to smile on him, to dance with him, when his look and touch makes me shudder. He leaves his blackmail; often he wrings it from me by threats. You have heard him to-night."

She paused, breathless, staggered back to her seat, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

Just at this moment Flo, the peering, the ubiquitous, the sly, came to the door unseen, and looked in. One moment sufficed for her to take a mental photograph of the scene and

glide away. She saw Mr. Glyn facing her, pale as death, seemingly dispensing judgment to two culprits. Lord Robert Montagu, who sat with bowed head, arms folded, and eyes fixed doggedly on the floor, he was one. The other was Madeline, who, stricken apparently with some heavy remorse, was dissolved in tears. What in the world did it mean? There were a good many things of which Miss Blunt would like to know the meaning.

Suddenly Lord Robert raised his head, and gazing at his *vis à vis* like a wild beast brought to bay, said, hoarsely,—

"And who are you? What have you to do with Miss Grant? Are you the mysterious, fabulous—but, no, you can't be!"

"I am Miss Grant's husband, if that is what you mean. I married her before her father returned to England," said Mr. Glyn, emphatically.

"I don't believe you," returned Lord Robert, brutally. "You may call yourself what you like. Where are your proofs? A likely story that she," pointing to his hostess, "is Mrs. Glyn. Why, you don't even speak."

"That is no proof against our being man and wife; in fact, it's rather on our side," said Mr. Glyn, bitterly. "But there is no occasion to trouble ourselves about persuading you into anything beyond leaving Dunkearn before breakfast to-morrow morning, which I shall take care that you do."

"I leave Dunkearn! I like your impudence! It is you, my brave son-in-law, whom Mr. Grant will drive forth. By George! if what you say is true, what a game you and she have played!" indicating the still weeping Madeline with a sweeping gesture of his hand.

"But the said game is up, I can assure you, with Mr. and Mrs. Glyn. Mr. Grant shall have his eyes opened before another twenty-four hours have gone over his head."

"But not by you," said Mr. Glyn, his eyes flashing with disdain.

"By whom, then?" with a savage sneer.

"By me."

Lord Robert uttered an exclamation of contemptuous surprise, and pulled his long yellow moustache.

"Yes, by me, this very night; there is no other alternative; and there are very strong reasons—one of them represented by you—that there be no more delay. "Madeline," glancing at his wife, "you see that in the end your promised duty falls on me," and walking across the room he opened the door and went out.

"Do you mean to tell me that that fellow is your husband?" said Lord Robert, standing up and approaching Madeline, who was now drying her eyes.

"That gentleman is my husband!" she said, with a flash in her eye.

"Dear me!"—ironically—"what a delightful surprise for Mr. Grant this announcement will be! Three years he has been the happy possessor of a son-in-law, and has not been aware of the fact; and for two you have been able to tear yourself away from that paragon of men, who has just left us?"

"Spare your sneers! Lord Robert. The wrong in keeping the marriage a secret from my father was all mine. It was against Hugh's wish always. For that reason we have quarrelled, or rather, he has let me go my own way, and given me my liberty. But I do not want it. I would—yes," suddenly looking round the sumptuously furnished library, "give up everything—everything that I lived myself for—money, dress, jewels, fashion, friends—and live on bread and cheese with Hugh if he would only forgive me?"

"No doubt you will have an early opportunity of testing your ambition. If I know Mr. Grant, he will lose no time in presenting his daughter—who has so long imposed on him—with the key of the street, and will have Miss Grant's husband kicked off the premises," he added, vindictively.

"I am not so sure of that, sir," said Madeline, rising and putting her hair back; "but I am sure of one thing, and that is,

that before I leave my father's eyes shall be opened to your conduct," she added, in a voice so low and so suppressed as to be scarcely audible. "Never," she added, with an imperious wave of the hand, "presume to speak to me again!"

"Never—presume? Ah! ah! A good joke! Do you know what you are saying, madam? You, the daughter of a low-born upstart. Presume, indeed! If your father had not made his coin by wringing it out of the miserable niggers, do you imagine anyone would have received such a little snob as he is, or looked at you?"

The end of this gentlemanly speech was lost, was solely addressed to the heavy black oak furniture, for Madeline had left him, and returned to face the remainder of the guests with what composure she might summon to her aid, knowing, as she did, that in her father's sanctum, at that very time, the crisis of her fate had arrived, and her future course was being decided without any reference to her.

She felt that she was in the proverbial position of the person who fell between two stools. If her father thrust her out of doors, she could not go to Hugh; if Hugh turned his back upon her, her father would not receive her. She had sinned against them both, and Nemesis had overtaken her at last.

If she had clung to Hugh she would have had a refuge now; but supposing that her father had, justly infuriated, spurned her, and sent her forth penniless, what was to become of her?

With this momentous question in her mind, no wonder that the guests remarked upon her scared, white face, and absent, ill-timed answers.

Mr. Grant, Mr. Glyn, and Lord Robert Montagu did not reappear among the company that evening.

CHAPTER XLII.

AND, meantime, what was going on in Mr. Grant's study? You shall hear. Hugh Glyn, spurred by the exigencies of the moment, and by hot temper, scorn, and not a few other items, had hardly quitted the library, and almost the first person he knocked up against outside its door was his host and father-in-law, Mr. Grant, the very man he wanted.

"Can I speak to you alone for a short time?" he said, without any preamble.

"Oh, to be sure," quoth Mr. Grant, his mind at once turning into legal channels. "Come along to my own den and have a smoke and chat. This reel-dancing and bag-piping and Highland singing, it's not in my line at all."

Mr. Grant's sanctum was close by, and soon the two gentlemen were within it. Mr. Grant, ensconced in his favourite morocco red chair, his visitor standing above him, one elbow on the mantelpiece, his face unusually pale and grave.

"Well, now, Glyn, fire away," said the little gentleman, lighting a cigarette. "It's about those deeds you were looking over, eh?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Grant. It's—to be plain—a more personal matter. You," hesitating for a second, "have made me very welcome here, and appeared—if I may presume to say so—to like me."

"And so I do, my dear fellow," very heartily, "so I do. I don't know a single young fellow that I like as well. You are clever; you are rising; you are making yourself a name. I only wish I'd had a son like you!"

"Then, what would you think of taking me for a son-in-law?" said Mr. Glyn, fixing his piercing dark eyes on the little old gentleman beneath him.

"Eh?" was his only reply for quite a long time—an eh! incredulous, indignant, and yet not wholly combative—a long, sonorous exclamation. "Personally, I like you, Glyn; could not like you better; but"—and he

Paused—"you see, Madeline is my only child. She is remarkably good looking too; created quite a furore in town. You are a very good fellow in your way, and a gentleman, but do not be offended when I say that I am looking higher for her. I mean I expect the man she marries to place a coronet on her brow. You will admit that she will grace it?"

Mr. Glyn bit the corner of his moustache, and said nothing; and his host, who, as he knew, liked the sound of his own voice, resumed,—

"Besides, Glyn, she does not like you. She can't, excuse me, have you. You must see it yourself! You would have no chance. It is truest kindness to tell you so. You have no idea what an iceberg she is! I can't make it out. I often wonder who she is looking for, or what she expects. She won't even give the fellows a chance of proposing for her."

"Look here, Mr. Grant! I can quite understand your views. Mad—I mean Miss Grant—would, of course, grace a coronet; but, let me tell you that we Glyns have far older, bluer blood in our veins than any mushroom titles of the last two hundred years. Look us out, if you will, in 'Butler.' You will see that we were here before the Normans. We are Saxons born. We are still a power in the land. Our family title is not extinct, it only wants money to revive it. I have many powerful relations, who, like relations, when I was poor turned away their faces, but to whom did I come as the rich and successful cousin would receive me with cries of welcome and widely-open arms, and would introduce my wife and myself to circles as exclusive and as far beyond the stray third-rate, noble pampers who prey on your—your good nature and your ignorance, and, pardon me, credulity, as the moon is above the earth. I speak plainly—"

"You do, sir, and with a vengeance," said Mr. Grant, a little overawed by the other's imperious manner, for Mr. Glyn had said to himself, why should he be timid before this man, who at best was a trader, a slave-owner, a man of yesterday—whose grandfather was unwept, unhonoured and unsung; a peasant descended from the like—while he, Hugh Glyn, though he boasted of no "uncared increment," was descended from men who were princes at the time of the Saxony Heptarchy?

"You value both, I see, Mr. Grant," said Hugh, holding out one hand, as if to convey the fact that he had scored a point; "and you value success. I am succeeding, and I shall succeed—I feel it—I know it—if my health is spared. I've brains, a ready tongue, and an indomitable will. I shall go into Parliament, and look what a vast field of possibilities that opens out! Which of your other would-be son-in-laws can aim at a political life? I have no wish to say hard things of them; but say, for instance, Levanter—what has he to offer but his ugly person—his empty title—his debts? Look at Montagu, look at the reputation he would bring you!"—Hugh shuddered as he spoke—"do not all decent men shun him as if he were a leper—is he not branded 'black sheep'? What decent club in London would own him? He, and others like him, offer to barter to you their wretched titles—but not, as you imagine, the entry to society for your daughter's beauty, of which they think but little, and her fortune, of which they think a great deal."

"Young man—young man!" gasped Mr. Grant, inarticulately; "you speak boldly—far too boldly."

"I speak the truth, and nothing but the truth," returned Mr. Glyn, impetuously. "I offer myself, my talents, my career, my lineage, for your daughter—and as to fortune, I do not want it. I am now, thanks to my own brains, an independent man. Give me your answer sir—yes, or no."

Many possibilities floated through Mr. Grant's brain as he sat for some moments in dead silence, revolving this offer. Levanter and Montagu were all that this impetuous

young man had said. He had good blood in his veins; he was handsome, clever, rising, whilst they were like leeches, ready to live on him, and giving nothing but barren names in exchange. This man's career at the bar was already "talked of," he himself could vouch for one success, which had agreeably affected his own pocket, and, with proverbial gratitude, looked in the same direction for favours to come; and he had an eloquent tongue, a ready wit, a fiery manner that carried all before him. He would go into the House, he would (oh, castle-building Mr. Grant!) be one of the great men—Chancellor of the Exchequer some day!

He shut his eyes, he saw it all. He saw his son-in-law addressing the House, and every ear within its walls hanging on his words. He believed himself an honoured stranger in the gallery, Maddie among the peeresses.

Mr. Glyn, keen and acute, saw that some great idea was working in his subtle mind, and struck while the iron was hot.

"May I hope for your consent, sir?" he asked, quickly.

"Well, yes, you may, if you can win her. You are welcome as far as I'm concerned. Yes," holding out his little yellow hand, with one big diamond blazing on his little finger; "if you can get round Maddie you may have her, as far as I'm concerned. It's time she was settled; she is three-and-twenty next birthday, and uncommonly hard to please. I did look for a ready-made title, but one can't have everything. I like you, you are tolerant to an old man's whims—you don't laugh at me under my own roof, and think I don't see it, like those other cubs. You are a real gentleman, and I give you Maddie—yes, and welcome, now that I have said so much, and I see what your prospects are; but the hitch, you will find, will be the girl herself. She does not take to you, and I would not honestly give much for your chance, to tell you the plain truth, Glyn."

"What would you say, sir," said Hugh, becoming a shade paler, "if I were to tell you that I had won her already?"

"The devil you have, and when?"

"Three years ago."

"What! before I came home—when she was at the Penns! Were you the half-starved fellow that I heard was hanging about her? Oh, never!"

"I am not sure that I was half starved, but I was assuredly in love with her nearly four years ago."

"Oh! so it's an old affair."

"Yes, an old affair as you say, Mr. Grant. Remember that you have given me Maddie, if I can win her, have you not? That is a promise?"

"Yes, I have," sharply. "I never go back of a promise."

"Well I am now going to tell you something that I am afraid will make you very angry, but you will hear me out. We have been married three years!"—he paused, not unnaturally nervous, awaiting the effect of his sentiment, and pulled his moustache.

"Why, what! what do you mean?" stammered Mr. Grant, his eyes nearly starting from his head. "What—what—what do you mean sir? I—I—I can't believe you, so there. Don't believe a word of it—a single word of it!"

"If you will only listen to me patiently you will believe all," said his companion, taking a seat at the other side of the table; "and I am going now to tell many things that ought to have been told you long ago."

Mr. Grant opened his mouth. No sound came. He was speechless, and his son-in-law proceeded very steadily.

"You were said to be bankrupt, if not dead, and Mrs. Penn gave you no law when your bills were not paid."

"You have not heard that Madeline from show pupil instantly sank to shabby school drudge, half-fed, half-clothed, and not paid for the work of two governesses."

"This went on for a year. I saw her at a dance, where she played all night for her school-fellows to dance. I fell in love with her."

"Miss Selina Penn hated her and me, and, to carry out her hate and malice, managed to have us left behind in Riverford one night late for the last train. It was all planned—all her doing."

"We waited exactly where she told us to wait, and the train went off and left us. Next morning I called to explain, but Madeline's character was gone."

"She was thrust out, dismissed without money. She had no salary, friends, or character. I had no resources, and I took her to London, and married her."

He paused and looked at Mr. Grant, who was livid, and nodded his head, and said, in a strange, loud voice,—

"Go on, sir, go on; get it over."

"I was poor. We lived in lodgings, but we were very happy. However, after a time, real poverty and sickness came in at the door. I had typhoid fever."

"It was a hot, unhealthy season, and nearly died. I sometimes have since thought it would have been just as well if I had, and released Maddie, and thus cut the Gordian knot. However, I hung on, a miserable, expensive, helpless, idle invalid. In the middle of all this the child was born."

Mr. Grant jumped a foot off his chair, composed himself subsequently.

"It was a boy—"

"A boy! Where is it?" demanded Mr. Grant, fiercely.

"You shall hear presently," said his companion, gravely. "Madeline was the tenderest of wives, nurses, and doctors."

"Madeline!—my Madeline!" said her father, in a tone of querulous incredulity and of shrill irritation.

"We had no money—none! I had no friends. I was poor," bitterly. "We pawned almost all we had, save the clothes on our backs. We were all but starving. In those days Madeline was a model of womanly courage, and endurance, and devotion. When I look back on those days I can forgive her much."

"Madeline pawning clothes! Madeline starving!" cried Mr. Grant, breathlessly.

"Aye, she was. We were barely able to keep the wolf out. Then came your letter and an advertisement from the Penns."

"Madeline pawned her wedding-ring to go to them, and they, never dreaming she was married, accepted her return with rapture as Miss Grant. Miss Selina was gone. She had no tell-tale ring, and they had heard she was in a shop."

"In an evil moment she saw your letter, where you spoke strongly about a poor love affair and possible marriage; so in desperation, and to get money and bread for the child and me, she deceived you."

"Later on, when the fascination of wealth and power worked their way into her soul, she still deceived you and forgot us. I must speak the truth."

"She put off, and put off the evil day of telling you all. I was out of all patience. You remember one evening we went to look at a painting in the drawing-room at Belgrave-square? That was my last appeal."

"She gave you up, then?"

"She did," expressively.

"And the child—my grandson!" eagerly.

"You remember the grand ball you gave?"

"Of course, of course," irritably. "It will not be forgotten in a hurry."

"He died that night," said Mr. Glyn, slowly.

"Eh! What? Died did you say? Nonsense!"

"He died of diphtheria. Madeline came too late. You may remember she wore black?"

"I remember it all. I remember her illness."

"The child," continued Mr. Glyn, after a

cause, "was a lovely boy. We kept him at a Berkshire farm-house. Many a time I told Madeline that the mere sight of him would soften you towards us, but she would not listen. She made many promises, and broke them. She feared you too much. Since then—since his death—I have had nothing to say to her; I gave her her freedom for ever. But it appears that Lord Robert Montagu knows her secret. He ran away with her from some picnic two years ago here. You may recollect they were left behind on the hills; and she, to put an end to his hopes, at once told him the truth. Since then he has levied a persistent course of heavy blackmail. I happened to overhear his modest request this evening for a thousand pounds more. I interfered. I quashed his intention of selling his secret to you. I came here myself, as I ought to have done before, but I was always hoping that Maddie—that Madeline—would break a little."

"I know, Glyn," said Mr. Grant, now rising, laying his hand paternally on his shoulders, "that she would tell me, but she never did. She has treated you shamefully, and me too. Afraid of me! Why, everyone knows that my bark is worse than my bite—say, I have no bite. What a mistake she has made. What an infatuated poor wretch! I am not such a monster as she would think! You took her in when she had no friends. Oh, what a troublesome old serpent was that woman! Hem! Steady payment for seven years, and to treat my daughter in that way! She, of course, did not know of your—of your being married?"

"No!"

"And now what is to be done? How is the marriage to be declared? Are you ready to make friends with Madeline, and she with you?"

"I cannot say that, Mr. Grant; my feelings are still too bitter—not for myself so much as for the child. Do you keep her here as your daughter, as Mrs. Glyn. He had best announce the truth. Perhaps, by-and-by, time, who heals all things, may bridge the gulph between her and me," and he buried his face in his hands.

"But this is all very fine in theory. How is the world to be told she has been humbugging them for the last two years as Miss Grant? Come now?"

"The wedding can easily be put in the paper as having taken place, but with no date, and you and she can go abroad whilst the world enjoys a nine days' wonder. It will be no more, and this is not the season."

"You are a clever fellow, Glyn. Ah! a very clear-headed chap. I will go by what you say; but I'm awfully upset by this story. It will take me days to turn it over in my mind. As to Madeline, I don't know how I'm to speak to her. Just ring the bell, I must have a glass of sherry, my nerves are on wires."

"Be lenient with her, Mr. Grant," said Hugh, quietly rising and ringing the bell as he spoke. "Remember she was only nineteen. Remember the temptations of wealth. Remember she has many good qualities, that she has had to bear an agonising grief in secret, and that she is your only child."

And Mr. Grant, after some hesitation, promised that he would remember, and he did.

(To be continued.)

There are men whose presence infuses trust and reverence; there are others to whom we have need to carry our trust and reverence ready-made.

The celebration of the golden wedding of the Marquis and Marchioness of Ailesbury took place on the Nov. 28 at Savernake House, Marlborough. Amongst the guests were Viscount Savernake, Lord Henry Brudenell Bruce, Lord and Lady Frederick B. Bruce, and Sir Henry Meux. The marriage took place at St. George's, Hanover-square, Nov. 25, 1834.

THE MARBLE HALL AT HATFIELD.

This magnificent apartment is probably unrivalled in the beauty of its oaken panels and carving. The noble and massive effect is increased by its exceeding loftiness.

It fills two stories of the north front, and is lighted by two tiers of three windows each, and by two oriel windows at the upper end of the north side.

The room is fifty feet long by thirty feet wide. An oaken wainscot, which runs round two sides, rises as high as the top of the chimney-piece. The wainscot is plainly panelled, and is without ornament of any kind.

This simple yet bold and free treatment of the wood is incomparably effective. Warm, rich and massive, the dusky oak most exquisitely reflects the ever-varying shades of light.

On the southern side of the room the wall-space between the wainscot and the ceiling is filled up by some clear and delicate Gobelins, with deep, effective borders.

But it is to its carved oak screen and its two galleries that the Marble Hall owes most of its fame. The screen is at the western end, and partitions the room from the lobby outside. It is divided by richly-carved pilasters into compartments filled with slightly enriched panels surmounted by an openwork fan ornament. The large folding doors, with their bold and sweeping arch, are identically treated.

Above the screen, and projecting slightly from it, runs the Visitors' Gallery. The front presents a wealth of carving, modelled on the same lines as the screen, but richer and more fantastic.

The plain shields of the two compartments beneath the apertures, for visitors to watch the diners below, are foils to the delicate arabesques and the fanciful tracery of the divisions which flank them. An enlargement of the fan ornament of the screen, surmounted by a bold and massive cornice, completes this delightful piece of artistic woodwork.

At the opposite or eastern end of the hall is a Minstrel's Gallery, which, having twelve open compartments, hardly presents so good an opportunity for the art of the decorator.

Nevertheless, it is richly panelled, and the panels are filled with delicate arabesques. Here are introduced the heraldic lions of the Cecils, bearing cartouche-shaped shields containing the emblazoned arms of the marquise. —*Magazine of Art.*

CHILD-MARRIAGES IN INDIA.—The native press have (says the *India Medical Gazette*) lately been discussing a subject of immense practical importance. With reference to the death of the Hon. Rai Cristo Das Pal, at the comparatively early age of forty-five, the question arose, Why do all the leaders of native thought in India die young? The majority of the papers answered it by pointing to the unhealthy condition under which an intelligent Hindu is born and is obliged to work. His mother—probably his father also—was a mere child at his birth; he himself marries as a mere child, and at twenty-one or twenty-two has the cares of a large and increasing family upon him. He has no breathing-time, or happy independence in early manhood, like the youth of Europe. He is forced by necessity to be precociously old; and in what we should call early middle life he finds himself prematurely worn out and exhausted. Thus the burden of the complaint is the custom of child-marriage. Certain educated Hindu gentlemen are calling upon the Government to legislate against these enforced child-marriages; but these are matters in which the Government cannot interfere. Such social reform must be brought about within the society itself; and, although its accomplishment is unlikely to be speedy, the educated part of the community should be encouraged to persevere in their crusade against ignorance and prejudice in the hope of ultimate success.

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FATAL FLASH.

THE storm subsided as suddenly as it had risen, and died away in a deluge of rain.

As soon as Lady Valerie had been carried to a sofa, a party was sent out in the farm-cart to find out what it was that was lying in the Scarsdale-road.

The Earl watched by his daughter's side in a fever of impatience to know the truth, his mind tortured by fears for his friend's safety. During the last month he had learnt to love Rex Verreker like a son, and the thought of him lying out there with the pitiless rain descending on his defenceless head was intolerable to him. He rang the bell, and ordered the brougham to be got ready at once, that he might follow his servants directly his daughter was in a fit state to be left in Miss Beck's charge, and never noticed that Panton, as he went out of the room, picked up a piece of crumpled note-paper which was lying on the floor; yet that scrap of paper was as dangerous, if it fell into wrong hands, as a packet of dynamite near a lighted match.

"Is he safe?" was the first words that Lady Valerie uttered, as her eyes roamed in eager search round the room for one who was not there.

"Quite safe, I hope and trust," said the Earl, soothingly, as he patted her soft brown hair. "I am just going to see after him."

"See after him? Is he here?" fixing her eyes on his face.

"He's wet through," said the Earl, evasively; "and he ought to change his things." Then he escaped from the room, with a guilty sense of half a falsehood clinging to him, and also a secret consciousness that his humbug was of no avail.

Directly he disappeared Miss Beck asked Lady Valerie, flurriedly, if she wouldn't go to bed.

"Before I know?" she answered, in such horror that the question was not repeated.

Lady Valerie closed her eyes, and thought and feared and hoped, till she felt as if she should go mad. Only that very afternoon she had been so unkind to him—refusing him a flower out of the smallest spite—and pretending to set up someone else before the truest, kindest, friend that girl ever had!

Oh! if repentance were of any avail, she felt as if she could weep tears of blood! What a time they were! That dark place on the Scarsdale-road was scarcely a mile beyond the park. She knew it so well, because as a child her heart used to beat fast as she rode by it, having been told by some foolish nurse that there were wicked fairies under the gloom of the branches. Now what a double horror hang over it, as the darkness shrouded the dead horse and the man who had been riding it so recklessly in the storm. Her teeth chattered with terror, whilst her eyes fixed themselves on the door.

"They are so long," she said, hoarsely, unable to bear the silence any longer.

"You see, my dear, they naturally would be," said Miss Beck, looking anywhere but towards the white face, with the big awestruck eyes, "supposing it turned out to be a man from one of the distant farms? They would have to carry him to his home before they came back."

"But it was not a man from a farm! Oh, I know!—I know!" with her hands clasped piteously against her chest.

"And the Earl has not been gone more than three quarters of an hour," said Miss Beck, with a glance at the Sevres china clock on the table by her side, which had once belonged to a Bourbon. "They could not get there and back in so short a time as that."

"Short! The clock must have stopped."

Then she lay back, perfectly still, her eyes closed, every sense concentrated on that of hearing.

The rain pattered against the windows, and the scent of shattered flowers came softly in on every breath of air.

The room, indeed the whole house was silent, though the maids stood about the hall or in the passages in affrighted groups.

Rex Verreker was a general favourite with the household ever since he had gone into the river to save the housekeeper's nephew from being drowned.

They said he was a gentleman down to the ground, and no one ever objected except the Marquis of Daintree's groom, who remarked that he didn't count anyone out of the poorage.

He was very nearly requested to leave the servants' hall in consequence, but Pantom interfered, and said that opinions were free.

The butler was the only person who did not share the general anxiety, or, if he shared it, he took it very philosophically, and withdrew to his own private room, where he indulged in a bottle of old port, and his most comfortable pair of slippers.

Having looked the door, he sat down in his armchair, and, having adjusted his spectacles, took out the paper which he had picked up on the drawing-room floor, smoothed out the crumpled with a careful hand, and held it up to the light.

A grim smile of satisfaction spread over his freckled countenance, for if he ever wanted to use a weapon against his master or his young mistress, he held a most effectual one in his possession.

The Earl, if he knew of its existence, would give thousands of pounds to have it destroyed, and it lay in Pantom's option whether or not he should win an independence for life.

The enormity of the possibility staggered him.

He put his fat arms on the table and blinked his eyes, thinking over the ten years which he had passed in the Earl's service.

"We've rubbed on pretty well together," he thought, with a nod of his grizzled head; "pretty well, considering the stiff backbone the old gentleman's got, to keep him from stooping to us poor folk; not but what he has often been wanting in a proper respect for my dignity. That he has, and there's no denying it. 'Taint as if we weren't all the same flesh and blood, only he's got a big house and I've got none, and he's got a handle to his name, and I've got nothing but a Mister. Well, I can bring him down on his marrow-bones whenever I like, that's a comfort, and the day may come when I shall be jolly glad to do it! Hang it! there's that bell, and all the fellows out!"

He rose from his seat, drew on his boots, put the bottle of wine in a cupboard, passed his handkerchief over his heated face, and hurried from the room, the drawing-room bell ringing vehemently again and again.

"Heaven ha' mercy! what can have happened? There it is again—if it's thieves and robbers I'm not going to face them alone. Here, Susan, my good girl," catching sight of her at the end of a passage, "you come along with me."

"Whatever is the matter?" with scared eyes.

"Nothing, nothing, only I think my lady will be wanting you, so just stand outside the drawing-room door, and you can tell the others," beckoning energetically, but afraid to stop.

"Tell the others, when I'm wanted myself! Whatever on earth does he mean?" She could not understand, but, like a sensible girl, she ran after him, not waiting for explanations.

Pantom disappeared into the drawing-room, and she leant against the wall listening, annoyed by the beating of her own heart, which seemed louder than anything else. Had any news arrived? Was Lady Valerie ill?

There were hurried steps inside the room, the sound of voices talking, the rustle of women's dresses. Curiosity and anxiety mingled kept her spellbound, although she heard the noise of wheels upon the gravel, and knew that she ought not to be found in the hall.

To her excited nerves a long time seemed to elapse before a carriage-door slammed, and with a slow, lingering footstep, as of one who has failed and is in no hurry to announce his failure, the Earl of Beaumont came up the marble steps, and bared his grey head as he entered the wide-open doors of his own stately house.

He sighed heavily as he handed his hat to Beaumont, and said,—

"Let me be told directly the messenger returns from Boardale, and let a further search be made as soon as it is light."

"I will go myself, my lord," said the valet, promptly.

"No, Beaumont, you must not try yourself too much. Let some of the gardeners go."

The drawing-room door opened, and Pantom came out looking strangely excited.

Beaumont instinctively stepped forward as if to shield his master from any further bad news, whilst Susan's head came peeping round a marble column, anxiety making her oblivious of her abnormal position.

"Please, my lord, her ladyship thinks the doctor ought to be sent for."

"Her ladyship?" It seemed an odd thing for Valerie to ask for the doctor for herself. Had anything happened to Miss Beck? "Is she ill? Speak out, can't you?"

Pantom drew himself up, as a reminder to his master not to trample on his dignity.

"Not her ladyship, my lord; but we can't make out what's the matter with Mr. Verreker."

"Verreker! Is he here? Good heavens! why didn't you say so?"

And pushing past the butler the Earl opened the door for himself, and saw the man whom he had been looking for half lying, half sitting on the sofa, with the blood trickling from a wound on his forehead!

CHAPTER XIV.

WHO DID IT?

How had he got there? This was all that Lady Valerie could tell her father, and he did not hear it till the next morning.

She was still counting the minutes till their return, when the door opened suddenly, and Mr. Verreker came into the room, his face white as his collar once had been, his hair hanging over his forehead, his clothes drenched and dripping. He stood and leant against the doorway, his eyes fixed upon the slight form reclining on the sofa, his arms hanging inertly by his side.

"Are you ill?" gasped Miss Beck, for Lady Valerie seemed unable to speak.

"No, I'm all right," he said, hoarsely; "but my horse—"

"Come in and sit down," drawing forward a chair, but even at that moment remembering how his wet clothes would spoil the handsome brocade. "Is your horse much hurt?"

"The poor brute's dead."

"You were on it, and yet you escaped?" came in a soft voice, trembling with thankfulness, from the direction of the sofa.

"Yes! Lady Valerie," and the shadow of a smile flickered round his ashen lips; "it had better been the other way, hadn't it?" Evidently he had not forgotten her cruel speech of the afternoon, and the wound was rankling still.

"No!" she said, rising from her seat, and coming towards him with appealing eyes. "Money can buy another horse, but it—oh! heavens, there is blood on your forehead!" stopping still and clapping her hands.

He passed his hand across his eyes, as if half bewildered. "Yes, the blow wasn't hard enough, but he did his best!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Miss Beck. "Surely it was the lightning that killed your horse?"

"Yes! but it was a little hunchback that tried to do for me," subsiding on to the end of a sofa, whilst his face grew deathly white; "curious, wasn't it?"

Valerie's eyes opened wide with terror. "A hunchback!" she repeated, in an awestruck whisper, whilst Miss Beck stood open-mouthed.

He leant his arm on the back of the sofa as if for support, and went on in a dreamy undertone, staring at the carpet. "Yes, the storm was bad enough—they told me not to go. I never thought of Simon. He bore up against it so bravely, and never swerved an inch, with the blue fire playing all round us, till he dropped down dead under me, and we both rolled over together. I felt the flame, and then I suppose I fell asleep or faint"—a pause whilst he was gathering strength—or recollection, "and when I opened my eyes I saw a horrid, misshapen brute with a stone in his hand. He raised his arms and let it go; it struck me here. I think he meant to kill me, but my head was hard or his strength failed him!"

"He shall be brought to justice," exclaimed Miss Beck, quivering with horror, "the idea of a murderer only a few miles from the house! What will the Earl say?"

Valerie was clinging to the back of a chair, "Don't tell papa," she said, with livid lips.

"Not tell him!" cried Miss Beck, again, whilst Rex Verreker stared dully as if he hardly understood. "My dear, he deserves hanging, and I could feel it in me to pay for the rope; but quick, ring the bell—he's ill—he's dying!"

She rushed forward to support him, whilst Valerie pulled the bell vehemently. The summons roused Pantom, as we have seen, from his soliloquies, and he assisted in raising Verreker's long legs on to the sofa. Then he undid the stud of his shirt collar, loosened his tie, and waited for the result, the ladies meanwhile bathing the wounded forehead with handkerchiefs soaked in eau-de-cologne.

"I shouldn't be minded being indisposed myself," thought Pantom, as he saw his young mistress bending over Rex Verreker with woman's divine compassion in her eyes. "But I could have dispensed with the old 'un's skinny fingers."

"See his hair, even his eyelashes have been singed!" said Valerie very low; "death came fearfully close."

"I don't like that blow, my dear," in a grave whisper; "one never knows what may come of a blow on the head. I wish the Earl were here!"

"There he is! I hear wheels. Go and tell him, Pantom."

Pantom left the room, and the Earl appeared instantly.

"How did Verreker get here? I had almost given him up. What has happened to him?" he asked, quickly.

Miss Beck laid her hand on his arm, and said solemnly,—

"That poor young man whom we have all liked and respected has been nearly murdered!"

"Good heavens!"

"Yes, you may ask him yourself, as soon as he can answer you. It was a man with a hump on his back who did it."

"Oh, hush!" exclaimed Valerie. "We are not certain—there may have been a mistake."

"Beaumont—where's Beaumont?" said the Earl hastily, looking round. There was a group of servants gathered outside the door, all listening eagerly, but afraid to enter.

The valet made his way through them, and came across the velvet carpet with his noiseless tread.

"Do you want me, my lord?"

"Yes; send one of the grooms for a doctor, and, tell me, do you know anything of a man about here with a hump on his back?"

"Yes, my lord!" A sudden movement

behind him attracted his attention, and he saw that Lady Valerie had sunk down on a chair, as if her knees refused to support her any longer. He was on the point of mentioning the name of the man's master, and where he lived; but something made him change his mind, and he contented himself with saying that if the Earl wanted him he should know where to lay hand his upon him. Then he left the room to give the necessary orders to the groom.

The Earl's brow was knit together with the greatest anxiety till Dr. Merton appeared, shaking the rain-drops off his coat, and smiling with his usual urbanity. He looked very grave, however, when he heard the circumstances of the case, and could not help wondering in his own mind whether Mr. Verreker's brain had not been addled by the fall and the lightning, and the hunchback was creation of his own imagination. He said it seemed to him extremely unlikely that any villain should make an attempt at murder without a robbery as well, when he could not be supposed to have a cause of spite against the intended victim. He examined the wound on the forehead, and gave it as his opinion that Mr. Verreker's head had struck against a stone.

He certainly had had a narrow escape from destruction, for one side of his coat was scorched, and the hair on his right temple singed.

Perfect quiet was recommended, and a prescription written out which was to prevent all deleterious consequences, and then Rex was allowed to retire to bed, and told to remain there.

"Impossible!" he said, at once. "I must start for Vienna to-morrow."

"I shall send a telegram to your chief the first thing in the morning," said the Earl, with a quiet smile, "and Dr. Merton shall give you a certificate, which I will enclose in a letter of explanation."

"You are very good," leaning his aching head on his hand, "but, indeed, I must be off. Mildmay is waiting to take his leave after I get back."

"Then Mildmay must wait a little longer," said Lord Beauchamp, in his most decided manner. "I have taken more trouble about you to-night than I ever did for anyone else, and I'm not going to let it be for nothing. Besides, I may want you for something else."

"I'm sure I'm endlessly obliged to you." "But—tut—tut; I don't want your thanks, go to sleep. What is the matter now?" noting the anxiety of his expression, with the keen perception that generally belongs only to women.

"I was thinking of that poor brute lying in the road," and, strong man as he was, Verreker's lips quivered.

"We brought him home," said the Earl, gently. "And to-morrow he shall be buried by my own horse, that came down with me last autumn. I think Valerie planted a rose-bush on his grave—girls are so sentimental."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks!" with heartfelt gratitude.

Dr. Merton gave a few last directions, then left the room with the Earl.

"I suppose I had better write a warrant for the hunchback's apprehension," said Lord Beauchamp, "and send it to the police-station?"

"Perhaps so, my lord, but you don't expect him to wait for it," with a wry twinkle in his eye.

"He won't have an idea that he is suspected," said Lord Beauchamp, hastily.

"A secret that is known to a dozen persons travels fast; and I think that there were as many as that outside the open door of your own drawing-room."

"But they were my own people," rather stiffly.

"They were, my lord; but there were some women amongst them, and if you can get a woman to hold her tongue, when her own life doesn't depend on it, I shall say that you have performed a miracle. Good-night, off,

rather, good-morning. I hope Lady Valerie will be none the worse for this excitement."

The doctor got into his gig and drove home, in the freshness of the early morning, so entirely engrossed in his own thoughts that he took no heed of the drops which were showering down on his hat and coat from the overhanging branches of the trees. If this story of Verreker's was not the creation of his own confused brain there was some particularly ugly mystery at the bottom of it. The would-be assassin was, as he well knew, the confidential servant of Colonel Darrell—the man who followed his steps wherever they went—and was supposed to be cognisant of all his secrets, a fellow whom the doctor suspected of being an unscrupulous agent in the hands of a man without a conscience.

If the rumour were true that connected Colonel Darrell's name with Lady Valerie's, some hidden complications might be brought to light, which would probably be highly inconvenient to the Earl and his daughter; yet he dared not give one word of warning lest he should be supposed to be interfering with their most private affairs, and hinting the slightest suspicion of the latter. A girl may be as innocent as the day, and yet if the smallest cloud of mystery hang over her head it may grow into a shadow that will darken her life. None knew this better than the kind-hearted little doctor, who was admitted into the confidence of half the neighbourhood, and had never been known to betray it.

He was quite alone, for it was not his habit to have his servant's rest disturbed as well as his own, when he was called for in the middle of the night, and he was glad of the circumstance when he caught sight of a crouching form in the wood, just outside the gates of Beauchamp.

Acting on a sudden impulse he called out "Zebedee!" and as the man hesitated, he added, fiercely, "come here, you rascal; sneak off if you dare!"

Thus adjured, the hunchback came out from the dripping bushes, and displayed an ugly face, with cunning eyes under shaggy eyebrows, long nose, narrow-pointed chin, and low forehead shaded by untidy loose locks of grizzly hair. His head was bare, and the brown coat which reached nearly to his ankles was patched and shabby. He touched his forehead with erasing respect, and stood still, blinking like a bat in the sunshine.

"Your master's out of England, I understand?" said the Doctor, flicking a fly off his horse's ear.

The man nodded.

"Then the sooner you go after him the better; take my word for it. I suppose there's somebody left at the Keep who can open the door to the police?"

Zebedee's face turned grey, and his chin dropped, but only for an instant. The next minute he made an awkward bow, and muttering "Thank you, sir, I'll hurry back to be ready for them," slunk away.

CHAPTER XV.

A LOST OPPORTUNITY.

LADY VALERIE felt strangely happy the next morning, and although she did not analyse her own reasons for being in such good spirits it is possible that Rex Verreker's enforced stay under the roof at Beauchamp had something to do with it. Also she was most likely much delighted to think that all Flossie Springgold's charms, backed by the further argument of a fearful storm, could not avail to keep him at Scarsdale Park the night before.

The knowledge that he must go away filled her with vague alarm, for he alone knew of the danger which threatened her, and he alone, she said to herself with shining eyes and a blushing cheek, could have the power to avert it. If he was poor she was boundlessly rich; if he had no position to compare with her own, she would willingly descend to his.

And then she turned away her pretty head for fear lest she should catch sight of her own blushing cheeks, for in her modest heart she scarcely dared to think of love under its own unmistakable name. It had been friendship until yesterday—friendship through all the long days of her slow recovery, till now, when the fear lest Miss Springgold's charms had won the day, and kept him a willing prisoner, had raised a storm of indignation in her breast.

Even as she was thinking of her she came into the room hurriedly, with her habit caught up in her left hand, her blue eyes wide open, as if with fear.

On seeing Valerie she darted towards her. "Oh, tell me, it isn't true—he can't be dead!" and she stood with clasped hands and heaving breast waiting for the answer.

"There is no one dead that I know of," said Valerie, calmly, irritated that any other woman should dare not only to feel such interest in Rex Verreker, but also to show it. "Won't you sit down?"

"Then he wasn't killed," with a gasping sob. "They said the lightning—Oh, Heaven! I was half mad!" and Flossie sank down upon the first chair she saw near her.

"He had a narrow escape. His horse died," said Valerie, slowly, feeling her heart growing as hard as a stone against the little beauty, although she ought to have softened at the remembrance of her own pangs of alarm the evening before.

"And he escaped? Not a broken bone, nor a scratch? Are you sure?" with vivid interest.

"He had a blow on his forehead, and the doctor says he is to be kept quiet," said Valerie, calmly, as she put her feet to the ground, and sat up.

"To be kept quiet! They always say that when there is anything serious. Oh, there's a dear creature, let me see him!" and she got up from her seat impulsively.

Lady Valerie opened her eyes to their fullest extent.

"He is in bed," she said, quietly, as if that settled the matter for good and all.

"That makes no difference," said Miss Springgold, with calm contempt. "I nursed my cousin Tom all through the rheumatic fever, and pulled him through besides, when the doctors had given him up. Let me go to him, we are such old friends."

"I tell you there is no danger," said Valerie, freely.

"They may tell you so, that is very likely. Why should they risk making you ill again for the sake of an acquaintance? But for me it is very different—he is my dearest friend," speaking rapidly, and clasping her hands tight together, "the best friend that girl ever had; and when he comes back from Vienna, he will be my husband."

For an instant the room, with all its pretty ornaments, gilded chairs, alabaster statuettes, and vases of flowers, seemed to whirl round, and Valerie caught hold of the arm of the sofa as if to steady herself, and then with a mighty effort she got up quite calmly, and rang the bell.

"Ask if Mr. Verreker is asleep, and if any one is with him," she said to the footman who answered it, and the sound of her voice was to her own ears like that of a stranger's, so cold and harsh.

"Thanks!" said Miss Springgold, fervently, but Valerie took no notice of her.

The answer, brought back in two minutes, was that the doctor had just been and administered another sleeping-draught, and the patient was to be disturbed on no account whatever.

Then Miss Springgold took herself off, forgetting to make the slightest inquiry after her hostess's health, and only begging her to let her know the last news that evening.

There was no real reason for anxiety, however. After a few days of quiet Verreker was himself again, and the doctor gave him per-



["THE SOONER YOU GO ABROAD AFTER YOUR MASTER," THE DOCTOR SAID, "THE BETTER. THERE IS SOME ONE WHO CAN OPEN THE DOOR TO THE POLICE,"]

mission to return to his diplomatic duties as soon as he liked.

As soon as he liked! The phrase seemed a mockery to him, when those duties must take him far away from England and Valerie. Did she love him? That was the question that haunted him night and day.

If she loved him it would be cruelty to go away and make no sign; and yet how could he, without any particular position, ask her to give herself to him with all the broad lands of Beaudesert, and half-a-dozen other places tacked on to her skirts?

The prosecution for murder had fallen through, because the suspected person was not to be found. The police had paid an early visit to Ivora Keep; but, early as it was, the bird had flown.

Dr. Merton breathed freely when he heard it, and cast a look at Lady Valerie, which she seemed to understand. Let the affair be buried in mystery, so long as Rex Verreker was safe; she could be content to let the would-be criminal go unhurt.

Not so Miss Beck, who, when she heard that the hunchback had run away, looked as if she would have liked to tear him to pieces with her own gentle fingers.

Valerie, to escape a discussion, took her hat and walked across the sunlit lawn to the shade of the slopes; and Verreker, seeing the glimmer of the white dress in the distance, got up from his own position, where he had been lying, with his long legs stretched out on the grass under the willow-tree, and followed on her track.

She heard his step, and straightway sat down on a seat, for her knees were trembling. The smallest exertion was too much for her, but she was tired of lying on the sofa, and had determined to make an effort. Her heart beat fast as the sound of his steps came nearer, ever nearer, till at last he stood in front of her, his hat in his hand, a small sunbeam twinkling through the branches on his yellow hair.

"You feel stronger to day?" he said, after a pause which had seemed long to her, because she knew that he was looking at her all the while, and tried to seem as if she did not know it.

"Yes, I am getting quite well. Papa talks of taking me abroad for a change, and I think I should like it."

"Ask him to bring you to Vienna," he said, with a conscious smile, waiting eagerly for her answer.

She looked down at the ivy growing over the arm of the seat.

"No, indeed; why should I? We have friends in Paris."

"I thought you had a friend in Vienna," drawing himself up, stiffly; "but if you don't think so, I suppose you haven't."

"A friend?" putting on an air of puzzled inquiry. "Oh, yourself, perhaps; but, then, we can see you in England."

"And quite enough of me too," with exceeding bitterness, as the glory seemed to go out of the sunshine and the sparkling waters, and a shadow came over the handsome face that had been so bright before.

"Searsdale Park saves us from having too much," with a joyless laugh, "We ought to be thankful for having it so near."

His eyes flashed resentfully.

"I have been over there twice; no, three times, during the last six weeks."

"So much may be done in three long afternoons," she said, with an involuntary sigh, as she thought that during those three calls, with a sudden jump he had gone from friendship to the very bounds of matrimony. She could swear he was free when he played the part of her good genius on the night of the ball, and now he was tied for ever to the greatest flirt in Blankshire.

He could not tell what she was alluding to, so answered, drily,—

"Yes, when there is much to be done."

"Miss Springold will make a pretty bride," she said, thoughtfully, as if she were already

plotting her in orange blossom and white satin, standing at the altar by Verreker's side. "I hope she will ask me to her wedding."

"Weddings are depressing things; worse than funerals."

"I hope you won't think so of your own," she said very low, with a slight quiver in her voice.

"My own?"—a harsh laugh sounded through the silence of the wood—"I think there is more chance of the other thing."

Lady Valerie's heart gave a bound, as it flashed across her that there must be some mistake. With a new light in her eyes she looked up at him for the first time, and the next moment all would have been explained, but—

"How d'ye do, Lady Valerie," said a cheerful voice close beside her, and Lord Daintree's broad form hid every glimpse of the river. "They told me I should find you somewhere about, so I thought I might venture to look for you."

The chance was gone, and Verreker stepped back in bitter disgust, knowing that he would not have another opportunity of speaking to Valerie alone.

Lord Daintree stayed to dinner, and stood by Lady Valerie's chair nearly all the evening.

In the early morning Rex Verreker started for Germany, and as he took his last look at the old towers of Beaudesert, he said to himself, "Good-bye to all that I care for; happiness is not for Rex Verreker," whilst Lady Valerie was weeping behind her curtains, with the rosebud in her hand which she had not had the courage to drop.

(To be continued.)

A MAN troubles himself with imaginary sorrows, and discards those things which could help him easily to eradicate those sorrows.



["OH! PLEASE, DON'T WAIT FOR MAMMA," BERTIE PLEADED, A LOOK OF DISAPPOINTMENT CLOUDING HER FAIR FACE"]

NOVELLETTE.]

HEART TO HEART.

CHAPTER I.

"The loveliest creature I ever set eyes on!"

And Digby Stretton turned his splendid eyes on his brother, and looked as if he expected him to speak.

Hubert Stretton laughed; Digby was always seeing the most beautiful girls in the world, he declared.

"Who is she?" he asked.

"Haven't the least notion, my dear fellow," his brother replied. "She was sitting under the old oak in the wood yonder, all by herself. She was dressed in white, and—"

"A full-blown Dryad!" Hubert said, laughing. "Did you attempt to propitiate her goddessship in any way? though the Dryads were not quite goddesses, according to Lempiere. A sort of half-and-half divinity, half mortal and half vegetable, wasn't it?"

"Don't chaff, Bertie, my boy; my Dryad was a lady, the loveliest I ever saw. You will say so when you see her."

"H'm, perhaps," the younger brother said—he was fastidious in the matter of female beauty. "Describe your beauty, Digby, my lad, and let me hear what she was like."

"She was lovely, that is almost all I can tell you," was the somewhat hesitating response. "She puzzled me."

"As how?"

"By the way she sat—she was as still as a statue; but that her eyes were open I should have thought she was asleep. I never saw such a face; no painter ever pictured such a one; no sculptor ever moulded such perfect features since Galatea sprang to life under the hand of Pygmalion."

"Bravo, brother mine," Hubert Stretton said, laughing. "It is a pity the young lady is not here to hear your rhapsody. I expect

she is some sentimental miss from the town, or some country cousin at the Rectory; they are always having all sorts of people there."

"Whoever she is she is a refined lady," Digby Stretton said, warmly. "I gathered that much from her voice and manner."

"Her voice?"

"Yes, it is music itself."

"You talked with her then?"

"Hardly! We spoke to each other. Lion here brushed rather roughly against her skirts—she was sitting close to a favourite hole of his, and he suspected designs on his rabbits, I suspect. She started as if she were frightened, and a curious look came into her face. I apologised, of course, and she looked me full in the face with such bewitching eyes; there was a far-away look in them, as if she saw beyond me somehow. I could hardly make her out; but she spoke, and her voice was music. She did not move, but she put out her hands in an odd sort of way, and—"

"Ah! An æsthetic young person, evidently," Hubert said, lighting a fresh cigar. "Those crazy folks do stare at you, as if they were looking through you at something else. That's their way of appearing 'intense.' You have not told me yet what she was like, old fellow—whether she was dark or fair, blue-eyed or brown, old or young, or—"

For answer Digby Stretton burst into such a panegyric on the lady he had seen that his brother only laughed and declared he must see the lady for himself, for she seemed to be every style of beauty at once. She was lovely, that seemed to be all that Digby could tell him, and her dress and manner betokened that she was a gentlewoman, and they both wondered that they had never seen her before. Digby had never seen such a face and form since he had come into his kingdom, and become master of the old house on the terrace behind them.

A grand old place was Stretton Royal—a place for any man to be proud of—and it looked grandly beautiful with the sweet summer sun-

shine, softened by coming evening, shining down upon it, and making all its windows glitter as if diamonds had been thrown broadcast against them by a giant hand. Old, grey, and ivy-covered, its walls had seen many a change since the first of the handsome Strettons had attracted the eye of the Virgin Queen and had received the reward of his beauty and his merit by being ennobled by her queenly hands.

There had been a Sir Digby Stretton of Stretton ever since, and the house had proved its gratitude by remaining loyal even in the most troublous times, when to be a king's partizan was to come to the block too often—to be ruined and sent naked on the world almost a certainty.

Stretton Royal could show the chamber where a Stuart hid from his enemies and found loyalty and good faith, despite large offered rewards and threatened punishment, and the deep hole in the dark cellar, where the family plate and heirlooms lay hidden while Cromwell ransacked and routed in vain. And the family records were full of traditions of the bravery and incorruptible loyalty of the Strettons of that day.

There were brave stories, too, of the family as it descended; there was the Stretton of Blenheim, and the one who died at the head of his regiment at Waterloo; and there was a handsome, merry-eyed portrait in the great banquet hall, the original of which lay far away out on the bleak hillside in the Crimea. The Strettons had served their country well, and were held in respect far and near.

They were not a numerous family; there were but few women amongst them. It happens so sometimes in families, and the two young men who were alone in the great house now had no sister. Their father had been dead about a year, and the Sir Digby Stretton who had succeeded him was young and well beloved of all who knew him, but he lacked the wonderful beauty of the old race. He had had it, he was born to it as an inheritance,

but fate had willed it otherwise, and when he was five years old an accident befel him which deprived his face at once and for ever of any claim to beauty.

No one quite knew how it happened—his nurse denied all knowledge of how the catastrophe came about; the child's clothes caught fire, and before he could be reached he was terribly burned. He was a sturdy little fellow, and he soon recovered, but the finely-cut, handsome features, the badge of the Stretton race, had disappeared for ever. His eyes had escaped—they were as brilliant and as speaking as before, and there was a charm about the smile that nothing, not even the fiery baptism the child had received, could take away.

"It will not be so much a scarred face as a distorted one," the family physician said to the sorrowing mother. "The actual scars will wear out, but the shape of the face will be altered," and Lady Stretton almost wished in her heart that her idolised boy might die, so passionately did she grieve over what had befallen him. She had been as proud of him, so delighted with his childish loveliness, that the cruel fate that deprived him of it was almost a death blow to her.

She lived to forget all about it, to see her son make up for his want of beauty by all sorts of endearing qualities that his younger and handsomer brother lacked, and to know that he had been to his invalid father a strong arm and a right hand to the day of his death. Everybody loved Digby, from the fond father who idolised his heir and forgot that he was not as handsome as his younger brother, down to the big dog that was crouching at his feet now as he stood with his brother on the soft grass below the great terrace, where royalty had strolled and chatted before now like any other ordinary mortals.

"It will be something to tell the mater when she comes home," Hubert said, puffing away the rings of smoke and trying to blow some of them into Lion's eyes, an affront which the big dog received with sublime indifference, only turning his great head away and putting his black muzzle into his master's hand; "she is always interested in your love affairs; they take the place of novels to her I verily believe."

"I never have any love affairs," said Sir Digby, with a half sigh. "You know that, Bertie. I never shall have. What woman would marry me?"

"Half the women in creation, my dear boy. You have only to throw the handkerchief and you'll see."

"Ah, perhaps," the elder brother said, "but what woman would love me, Bertie? I have seen them turn away with a shudder when they have been introduced to me, and—"

"And that's all bosh!" Hubert said, heartily. "You are too sensitive by half; the old house yonder and the Stretton acres would blind any woman."

"Yes, I know," the Baronet said, and there was a ring of pain in his deep, resonant voice. He had the Stretton voice left him—the voice that the poor said was "as good as music" to hear; "but I will take no woman so blinded for my wife. Until someone will have me for myself alone, and forget that I am as ugly as the veiled prophet of Khorsawan, I will bring no mistress here. The family honours will come to you, Bertie; you will be a fitting master of the old home some day."

"Heaven forbid, if it costs me you," the younger man said, and he meant it. Reckless and headstrong though he was, costing his mother many a bitter tear and sleepless night, Hubert Stretton dearly loved his brother, and would have given his life to serve him. They would have resembled each other very closely but for the unfortunate accident that had deprived the elder of his good looks, and they had two points of resemblance left still—their eyes and the remarkable voice.

Not seeing them Lady Stretton often declared she could not tell her sons apart—

their voices were so similar, and they bore a masculine resemblance to her own, which was very soft and sweet. She was a stately lady of rather a bygone pattern, who looked like a queen in her velvets and lace, and who kept up the dignity of the house to its fullest extent. In spite of the somewhat careless good-fellowship of the Baronet, and the reckless dissipation of her younger son, she was away on a short visit when the Dread adventure, as his brother called it, befel Sir Digby, and Hubert proposed to relate it to her when she returned.

"There are new people at 'The Idmes,' he said to his brother; "perhaps your wood nymph belongs to them."

"Has the mother called there?"

"Not yet. Get her to when she comes back. It is a lady who has taken the house, I know."

"It is a serious case, I can see," Hubert Stretton said, as they went into the house—and he was right. It was serious, if to fall in love with an ideal were a serious matter. It was just what his brother had done. Somehow or other his heart had gone out of his keeping, and fluttered to the feet of the unconscious girl who had sat under the old oak in the wood that morning.

Two or three days passed by, and Digby saw no more of the mysterious stranger. The brothers hunted the wood, and strolled through the lanes, and all to no purpose; there was no sign of anyone except the ordinary people belonging to the place.

They heard of the newcomers to the house. Hubert had called "The Idmes," a handsome house just outside their own park gates. It had once been the Dover House of the Strettons, but through some forgotten litigation had passed out of their hands and was out of their domains; it was always inhabited by people of birth and condition, and had only recently been vacated through the death of its occupier.

The brothers heard that a lady had taken it, Mrs. Blount by name, and that she had daughters, but that they were all away just then, not to return for a few days.

"So your innamorata did not come from there," Hubert said to his brother, after they had heard this piece of intelligence. "She was a wait from the big world of London, I suspect, out for a holiday. You will see her no more, I suspect."

"I have a feeling that I shall," Sir Digby replied, and he was right. The time was coming very soon when he should see that sweet face again and hear that gentle voice that had gone to his heart with such a tender thrill.

Two days later his brother had gone to meet their mother, who was returning home, and Sir Digby, detained by business that he could not put off, was walking to the house of a tenant through a shady lane that ran along one side of the park. It was a sweet, secluded spot, a bit of real ruralism; the hedges fragrant with the scent of wild roses and honeysuckle, and bright with flowers of all sorts. He was lounging along when he heard the sound of wheels and the rattle of a horse's hoofs as if some vehicle were being very carelessly driven, or a horse had run away.

It came in sight while he was wondering—an empty trap, drawn by a frightened and evidently runaway horse, the little vehicle rocking from side to side and threatening to turn over every moment. At the same instant a white figure started up from the side of the path—a slight girl who had evidently been sitting down on the grassy edge of the path. It was the girl he had seen in the wood, and she stood still with a wild, white face, right in the way of the approaching danger.

CHAPTER II.

It was all over in a moment, as Digby Stretton told his brother afterwards. He had sprang forward at the risk of his own life, for the frantic horse and the rocking vehicle were

within a very few yards of him, and with a desperate grip had seized the girl and flung her on to the bank from which she had risen, rolling into the hedge himself, and struggling wildly amongst the briars and stinging nettles in a most unromantic and unheroic fashion.

He recovered himself as the horse flew by, and shook himself free of the thorns and leaves, and went to the young lady.

She had fainted from fright, and he raised her beautiful head, and took off her hat. His eyes had not deceived him—it was the same lovely girl he had seen under the old oak, and she was lovelier than ever as she lay upon his arm, pale as marble, and cold and still as death itself.

A wealth of golden hair fell over his knee as he supported her, and dark eyelashes swept the cheeks that were so pale, yet so beautifully rounded.

She was daintily dressed, though very simply, in a muslin dress, with a broad-brimmed straw hat.

Everything about her told its own tale of fastidious neatness. From the delicate lace ruffles at her neck to the tip of her little boot her attire was that of a lady.

And yet he had never seen her before. How came she there? and what had made her start into the middle of the road like that? It was as if she did not see the coming danger, or was not conscious what she was doing.

She opened her eyes as he was wondering what he should do or how he should get help, and he saw their brilliant beauty looking straight into his. There was no consciousness in her face, no confusion. She put her hand on his breast, and said, in a bewildered tone—

"Is that you, Dormer?"

She was evidently not herself yet. Her fright had shaken her terribly, and he laid her gently down, fearing to alarm her further.

"Are you better?" he asked. "I hope I have not hurt you?"

"No, I am not hurt," she replied. "What has happened? Where is Dormer. I do not know you."

"You were in danger of being knocked down by a runaway horse. I was fortunate to be able to help you. I think the fright made you faint. You did not see."

"See? How could I? Who are you that is speaking to me?"

"Not see?" and Digby Stretton looked into the beautiful face with something like awe. "Is it possible you do not see me now?"

"I can see nothing—I am blind."

There was a sad ring in the sweet voice, and the young man looked at her with pity and admiration unutterable.

No one would have known from a casual glance that there was anything the matter with the sweet, pensive-looking eyes, and the rest of the face was as expressive as if she had seen and noticed everything that was going on around her.

Digby looked at her, and longed to clasp her and her helplessness to his heart, and tell her how sorry he was for her.

"Blind!" he ejaculated. "I did not know; I could not tell. I am afraid I have frightened you terribly."

"No," she replied. "I was terribly frightened. I heard the noise, and I thought I should be killed, and I could not make Dormer hear. I suppose she has not come back. Then you have saved my life! How shall I thank you? Ah, I cannot! Mamma must do that."

"Will you tell me who 'mamma' is, and let me take you home?" Digby asked as nervously as if he were a schoolboy and she a duchess. "I do not see your attendant. She was with you?"

"Oh, yes; I sent her for something. I was not afraid to be left alone. I like sitting out-of-doors, and this lane is very secluded."

"Not so secluded that runaway horses don't come along it sometimes," Digby said; and the girl looked up at him with a light coming into her eyes.

"I know you," she said. "You spoke to me in the wood. You are the gentleman with the dog."

"For whose rudeness I most heartily apologise. He is not fierce, only excitable. You must allow me to introduce him to you some day in a more gentle fashion."

"Oh! I was not afraid of him," the girl said; "I was only startled. I cannot see anything coming, you know, and he came upon me in a somewhat sudden fashion."

"That he did. Here is someone running across the field—a woman in a blue gown. Will that be your attendant?"

"Yes, that is Dormer. She is very fond of blue. Thank you once more, Sir Digby. Mamma must speak for me. I cannot say all I would. My heart is too full."

"You know me, then?"

"Everybody could tell me who it was that had a dog called Lion, and a pleasant, kindly voice. Your people sing your praises, I tell you."

"Since you know me, may I now hear your name?"

"Did I not tell it you? I am Beryl Blount. Mamma lives at the Dower House. She is away just now. When she comes back and hears what you have done she will thank you for us all. Dormer, is that you? What are you crying for?"

A stoutish, comely-faced country woman, very much out of breath, had burst through the hedge not many paces from them, and was sobbing violently, and mopping her hot face with her apron.

"It was the horse, dear. I saw it and the trap all broken, and I knew where I had left you, and I thought you must be killed or hurt, but it passed close here, didn't it?"

"I should have been killed but for this gentleman," Beryl Blount replied. "I was right in the way of it. I ought not to have sent you away, Dormer. I have no more sense than a baby when I am left to myself, and let my ears play me strange pranks. Don't cry in that idiotic way. There's nothing the matter."

"Except the gentleman's face," said the matter-of-fact Dormer. "He's scratched it awful. It's quite a sight."

"It is nothing, I assure you," Digby said, remembering that the blood was trickling off his chin, and making him an object to be stared at, if nothing more. "I had to take a header into the hedge, that was all, and there were thorns there."

"I should think there were," Dormer said, shortly; "big ones. You had better come home with my young lady and me, sir, and get a basin of water. You'd frighten anyone belonging to you, I can tell you, if they were to see you now."

"But Miss Blount says her mamma is away, and I should hardly like to take the liberty," Digby began. But Dormer cut him short.

"Miss is away," she said, "but I am there. You come along, sir; you can't go back through the village like that. Miss Beryl won't be satisfied till you do come."

"No, indeed, I shan't; please come," the blind girl said, holding out her hand, which Digby took and clasped, forgetting that he had only known her name a few minutes.

"Please, let us do what we can for you. I am so sorry!"

"There is nothing to be sorry for, I assure you. My scratches are only skin deep. A little water will clear away all traces of them. I had forgotten all about them till your servant reminded me that I had been in the way."

He drew her arm through his, and with Dormer on the other side of her, they walked towards the Dower House, which was far nearer than Stretton Royal to the place where Beryl had so nearly been killed. Nothing could have saved her had not help been at hand. She was right in the path of the terrified horse, and must inevitably have been

thrown down and run over if Digby had not been there to aid her.

"Mamma will be back on Tuesday," Beryl Blount said, as they entered the house; and her escort smiled to himself, as he thought how he and his brother had determined that the fair unknown of the wood could not belong to the Dower House because the inhabitants thereof were away. She had been left behind with Dormer, and was welcoming him with the ease of a young duchess, and with as much coolness and courtesy as if she could see.

"Dormer, take Sir Digby to a room, and see that he has everything he wants," she said. "I am sorry we have no man to wait on you," she added to him, with a pretty smile. "Mamma does not keep one now, and there is only one servant here to-day besides Dormer; but if you would like your own man—"

"Oh! no, thank you," the Baronet replied. "I am very independent; in fact, though, I would not own as much to everybody. 'My gentleman,' as he calls himself, is rather an old man of the sea to me at times; I like to wait on myself."

"Blind!" said Sir Digby to himself, as he washed the traces of his tussle with the thorns from his face, and mused as he looked at himself in the glass. "Am I glad of it, I wonder? I think I am. It is something to know that she can never turn with disgust from the sight of my misshapen face—never. Bah! What a fool I am! What an utter brainless idiot! What is she to me?—what am I to her? Nothing! We may never see each other again, and there may be some one else in her life that— Digby Stretton, you are an idiot. Look at your face and come to your senses. But she is blind—blind, she can never see it, and—"

"If you please, sir, Miss Beryl has had luncheon served in the morning-room, and she says will you take a mouthful before you go, if you don't mind humouring her, poor dear. She will be so pleased, I know."

The last part of the invitation was Dormer's own interpolation. Beryl had simply charged her with a request that Sir Digby would lunch before he went. Would he? Would he not? He would have done anything she asked him. He had fallen blindly down and worshipped her ever since that chance meeting in the wood; and it needed no persuasion of Dormer's to make him give a ready assent to the request.

He remembered, with a smile, what the woman had said, when he hesitated about going home with them in the absence of the young lady's mamma; and he knew perfectly well that if there was any blame, when Mrs. Blount returned, it would rest on her shoulders, and Beryl would be held blameless. So he went down to fall more abjectly in love than ever with the lovely vision of beauty that met him at the door of the pretty room, where the simple repast had been laid out.

With her hat off, and the sunny hair crowning her shapely head, Beryl Blount looked even more bewitching than in her outdoor costume, and Digby watched her, as she moved about with perfect grace and fearlessness, feeling as if he were in a dream.

Dormer remained in attendance, to wait upon her young mistress, and play propriety, and Beryl chatted to her guest as if she had known him all her life. She had the fearlessness of a child, combined with the graceful charm of a woman; and the baronet listened, and talked, forgetting everything but the pleasure of the hour.

He learned a little about the Blounts during the luncheon. That they were people of refinement and means he judged from everything around him. Mrs. Blount was a widow—that he had gathered before—and fond of a country life, and she had three daughters—one married, in India, one a beauty much admired, at present with her mother on a visit, and his charming hostess, whom he decided must be the most beautiful of them all.

Mrs. Blount was the widow of a Colonel in the army, and had left his wife an ample fortune, and provided for his girls as well; Beryl pointed to his portrait hanging over the mantelpiece with evident pride.

"That is papa," she said; "but not half handsome enough. He has only been dead three years. I used to think him the handsomest man that ever existed."

"Then you could see him? You were not always—"

Not always blind, Digby Stretton was going to say, but he stopped suddenly, remembering that he might be touching on a painful topic; but Beryl understood and replied,—

"No; I could see once," she said, with just a little sadness in her voice. "I have been blind about seven years—it was from an illness and cold, at least the doctors say so. I am thankful that it did not destroy the look of my eyes as well as their usefulness."

The speech sounded as if there were a touch of vanity in it; but nothing was farther from her thoughts.

"I like people to like me," she said, naively, "and it is so difficult to love ugly folks, is it not?"

"Is it?" asked Digby, with a sudden heart-ache. Was he not ugly beyond redemption?

"I used to think so," she answered; "I can only like or dislike people now from their actions and words. I judge by the sound of a person's voice what they are like. Mamma says I am infallible in that way."

"I am afraid Lion's voice was not prepossessing the other day, then," the baronet said; "he gave tongue in a fashion likely to scare any lady."

"It was a good honest bark," Beryl said, simply, "and matched his master's voice well. I think you have the very nicest voice I ever heard, Sir Digby."

CHAPTER III.

DIGBY STRETTON'S heart gave a great bound at the pretty words and the sweetly spoken compliment. Her gentle eyes were turned to his face just as if she could see, and it was hard to believe that there was nothing but darkness there—they were such speaking eyes. There was a searching, inquiring expression about them that is sometimes very painful in a blind person, but in this lovely girl it only just hinted at pathos; her face expressed nothing but gentle content and bright thankfulness when anything fresh came under her notice.

"I must be dreaming," the young Baronet said to himself. "It cannot be real. This lovely girl like a princess out of a fairy tale—and I here alone with her as if I had known her all my life, and she cannot see me—cannot look upon my face and recoil at it as I have seen many do."

They were virtually alone. Dormer was in attendance on her young mistress, placing what she wanted within her reach and waiting for orders, but she paid no attention to anything that went on, and might have been a stone statue in her imperturbability. Digby Stretton was amazed at the deft manner in which the blind girl waited on herself and did the honours of her table. She never made a mistake or touched the wrong thing, and he almost forgot to eat while watching her.

"You pay me a very high compliment," he said. "I am afraid you would think me the very rudest man in the world if you could see me now."

"Rude men never speak as you do," she replied, quietly. "What are you doing that is so terrible?"

"Staring at you. I can hardly believe that you cannot see me. No one would know that you were—that you couldn't see, to watch you now."

"Ah! who is paying compliments now?" Beryl said, smiling. "If I am not so helpless

as some blind people I owe it all to Dormer. Where are you, Dormer?"

"Here, Miss Beryl."

"She has taken such pains with me," the girl went on, possessing herself of the hand of her attendant, and laying her cheek upon it. Sir Digby thought he would have given half his possessions if it had been his hand instead of Dormer's. "She has taught me to be quite independent. I was very fretful and unkind at first, and if she had not been the most patient and loving of women she would have let me alone; but she said I should find the benefit of it all afterwards, and so I have. It is almost as if I had my eyes—she has taught me to do everything in the dark."

"Ah, she has taught herself, sir," the faithful servant said. "These never was such a patient creature," and Beryl smiled and said,—

"There, there, Dormer, that will do," with a pretty air of authority and dismissed the subject with quiet tact and good breeding.

"I do hope you are enjoying your lunch," she said to her companion. "I cannot see whether you are eating or not. I hope you didn't hurt yourself very much."

"Oh, my hurt was nothing. 'A little water clears us of this deed,' as Lady Macbeth says. I have left all my scratches in the dressing-room; besides, a scratch more or less does not signify to me much."

"Dear me, most gentlemen are very particular about their faces."

"Ah, well, I am not one of them," Sir Digby said. "Miss Blount, may I take you home and introduce you to my mother? She will be delighted. Lion, get out! What brings you here, sir?"

His speech was interrupted by a squeal from Dormer and the sudden entrance of Lion through the window. Dormer had a rooted belief that every big dog she met was bent upon instantly devouring her, and Lion had brushed past her with scant ceremony in his search for his master.

"He has broken his chain," Sir Digby said. "He will do it sometimes, when he misses me. Don't be frightened, Miss Blount; he will not hurt you."

"No, I am sure he will not," Beryl said, as the big dog, having snuffed round her for a moment, sat down by her side and laid his head in her lap, as if he were conscious of her affliction and would not scare her by jumping up or offering her a paw she could not see.

"Lion is a gentleman," she said. "Like his master," and again Sir Digby felt himself crimsoning all over at the outspoken compliment. It did not seem to occur to Beryl that she was saying anything out of the common in thus speaking her mind. She said what she thought, as any child would have done, and her guest felt a wild longing to take her in his strong arms and kiss her sweet face. He was giddy with the new and delightful emotion. He had never seen a woman who charmed him as this helpless blind girl did.

"I must go," he said, somewhat suddenly, looking into her sweet face and wondering whether she guessed what made his voice tremble, and the hand that he touched hers with shake as if it were a leaf. "They will wonder what has become of me at home, especially now that Lion has set forth in search of me. He only does that when he is very much disturbed about his master."

"You will come again?" she said, simply. "I am afraid I have detained you a long time, but I am so grateful to you and it has been so pleasant to hear you talk; and bring Lion, please—I think he likes me."

"I shall be only too glad, and so will Lion," Sir Digby said, pressing the little hand that lay so confidently in his own. "When Mrs. Blount returns my mother will have much pleasure in making her acquaintance—and yours."

"Oh, please don't wait for mamma," Beryl pleaded, a look of disappointment clouding her fair face. "She may stay away ever so

long. She knows I am quite safe with Dormer, and that I don't care for company, and—"

"I will bring my mother whenever you like, if you are quite sure that Mrs. Blount would like it," Digby said. "She will be at home to-night, I expect," and with another pressure of the hand and a loving look into her sightless eyes, which would have spoken volumes to her could she but have seen it, he left her.

"He's gone!" sighed Beryl, as she stood by the window listening to his retreating footsteps.

"Yes, dearie, he's gone," Dormer said, rather shortly; "and I don't know that I ought to have let him come here at all."

"Not let him come! Why, Dormer, he saved me from being killed. I should have been dead by now but for him."

"Yes, I know, my darling," Dormer said, lovingly. "But it would have been as well to let him go straight home. But for his face, and he had scratched it terribly, poor young gentleman, I should not have asked him here."

"Then you would have been a spiteful thing, Dormer," Beryl said, somewhat petulantly. "Why, it has been like a gleam of sunlight talking to him and listening to his glorious voice, Dormer. A man with a voice like that ought to be as handsome as a god."

"Well, he isn't to say handsome," Dormer said, smiling to herself, as she thought of Digby Stretton's scarred face; "but he's as nice a young gentleman as I ever saw."

"Nice! he's glorious. I should love him dearly if I knew him better; I know I should."

"Dear heart, Miss Beryl, that's not the way a young lady should talk of a gentleman. I hope he won't come here any more till your ma comes back; we mustn't let him in till we know whether she will approve of it."

"Ah! What have I done that you should speak to me in that tone?" Beryl asked in dismay. "You make me feel as if I had done something un ladylike or improper; perhaps I have, and he will dislike me for it. I am so different from other girls. I cannot see like them when I have made a mistake; I cannot read people's faces. I can only judge by their voices, and his was all music, Dormer!"

Her overstrained nerves gave way, and she burst into passionate weeping; and Dormer, taking her to her heart as if she were a little child, comforted her and soothed her, and tried to make her understand that she had not been blaming her, but feeling all the time that she wished her mistress would come back. It was dangerous for Miss Beryl to be talking of a man as if she had already learned to love him, and she had only met him twice, and, for aught she knew, he might be going to be married to someone else.

"Not that anyone will want to marry her, poor darling," she said to herself, in thinking the matter over. "There's no love of that sort for her, and she ought to be kept out of the way of it. She'll just go on talking to missis as she has talked to me, and I shall catch it. I hope he won't come here any more while we are by ourselves."

Dormer need not have been afraid. Digby Stretton was fated not to see her young mistress for some time. A calamity had happened while he had been out that morning that was nearly ending as seriously as the one from which he had had the good fortune to save Beryl Blount.

Striding up the avenue with bent head, intent on self-communing, and wondering at himself for the strange new happiness that seemed to fill his heart and make another man of him, he ran full tilt against some one coming in the opposite direction.

"Oh! Sir Digby, I beg your pardon," the man said—it was one of his own servants—"I was running to seek you, sir. An accident has happened."

"An accident!"

"Yes, sir," breathlessly.

"To whom?"

"To Mr. Stretton, sir; he was in the gun room and—"

"And what? for Heaven's sake speak, man," Digby said, for the man had paused from sheer want of breath.

"They hardly know yet, sir, I think. I was sent off to fetch you before the doctor got there; but he isn't dead, Sir Digby. Don't look like that, indeed he isn't. I was to say he was badly hurt; that was all they could tell. Mrs. Welford was with him, and Mr. and Mrs. Hastings had come over from the Rectory, and the doctor was sent for. Jam took Black Diamond. He said he was sure you would not mind."

"Mind! Of course not," Digby Stretton said, his heart sinking within him as he listened. What should he say to his mother when she returned that evening if her darling was dead? He gathered that Hubert had been cleaning a gun which must have been loaded. There was no other way, of accounting for what had happened, and it had gone off or burst—the servant did not know which—and wounded him badly in the thigh and hand.

He forgot Beryl Blount's very existence as he bent over the pale form on the library sofa, and wondered whether the kindly eyes would unclose again, and whether his brother's voice would ever give him gladsome greeting in this world again.

"She would not have grieved so much if it had been me instead of him," he thought, with just a tinge of bitterness as he thought with grief of his mother and her homecoming. "What shall I say to her when she asks for her boy?"

"Take care of Bertie" had always been Lady Stretton's injunction to her elder son when the two had been boys, and Digby had taken care of Bertie in every possible fashion ever since they had been two rollicking school-boys together, and as far as he could through their life since.

Bertie had been a trouble and an anxiety to him always—everlastingly in scrapes—from some of which it was difficult to extricate him, and more difficult still to keep the knowledge of them from his mother; but, with all his follies, loved and cherished as prodigal sons always contrive to be.

"It will go far to kill her if anything happens to him," his brother thought, as he waited for the flat of the doctors; and he fairly broke down and sobbed when they came to him and told him that, with all due care, it would not be death this time. Bertie was sorely hurt, and would lie a helpless cripple for some time, but unless something unforeseen happened he would live.

"No, I'm not dead, old boy," Bertie's voice said to him when he bent over him in thankfulness for restored sense, and knowledge of what was passing around him. "You are not to get rid of me this time. Don't let the matter frighten herself into a fit when she comes back. I am only weak from the shock and the bleeding; I don't know how I came to be such a confounded ass."

There was more the matter than that, but there was great cause for thankfulness that things were no worse; and Lady Stretton, when she returned, wept tears of mingled joy and sorrow over what had come to pass.

No wonder that she heard nothing of Digby's adventure, and that the baronet forgot for time the fascination of Beryl's sweet eyes and winsome face, and thought only of his brother lying between life and death, and the mother who was sorrowing over him so deeply.

CHAPTER IV.

ALMOST the first persons to call and inquire after the invalid were the mother and sister of Beryl Blount. They had not been introduced to Lady Stretton and her son, but they made their gratitude for Digby's rescue of the blind girl serve as an introduction to the stately lady of Stretton Royal; they had hurried home on hearing of the peril she had been in, much to Miss Blount's disgust. She loved her sister according to her lights, and when her affection for her did not interfere

with any enjoyment of her own; but she was a willful beauty, and loved her own way, and this "disagreeable affair," as she chose to call it, curtailed a very pleasant visit, and brought the attentions of a decidedly eligible young gentleman on an untimely end.

"Mamma is so absurdly fond of Beryl," she said to one of her companions who was bewailing her departure, "that she cannot be satisfied with Dormer's account of her, but must drag us back to make sure that she is all right. Dormer should take more care of her than allow her to roam about the lanes and fields by herself in that way."

There was some honey amongst the gall, after all. She would be introduced to Sir Digby Stretton, and he was a decidedly eligible man—young, rich, and unmarried; which latter faults she proposed to herself to correct in due time. She had heard he was very ugly, but what of that? He was a baronet with as many thousands a-year as her mother owned hundreds, and would make a capital match.

Mrs. Blount and her daughters had come from quite another part of the country to the Stretton Dower House, as it was still called, so the two ladies were quite strangers to each other, and regarded one another with not a little curiosity. Mrs. Blount was a stately person, with much dignity and self-satisfaction about her, but she was by no means such a thorough-bred looking woman as Lady Stretton, who looked like an empress, and greeted them with the courtesy of a queen.

"It is very kind of you to see us at all," Mrs. Blount said, when they had mutually introduced themselves and were seated. "I did not expect it. But I could not help coming to tell you how grateful we all are. I should have lost my darling but for your brave son. May I not see him and thank him for myself?"

"He will hardly leave his brother for a moment," Lady Stretton said, touching the bell, "but he will be glad to hear from your lips that the young lady is none the worse for her fright. Sometimes the ill-effects of such an accident do not show themselves directly. Digby's scratches, for instance, are far uglier to-day than they were at first. You have heard of his struggles with the brambles, I dare say?"

"My poor girl at home believes he was nearly scratched to death. I think," Mrs. Blount said; "she is apt to magnify things, as blind people will. She was terribly excited when she heard of what had happened to your younger son. I hope the accounts that have reached us grew in the carrying?"

"All is well now, I hope and believe," Lady Stretton replied. "My boy's recovery will be slow, but it is tolerably sure now. Digby, here is Mrs. Blount come to see and thank you, and to make kind inquiries for our dear Hubert."

Digby Stretton's heart gave a great leap as he greeted the mother of the blind syren who had taken his heart captive. He had been too much occupied with Hubert to think of aught else till now. But his thoughts went flying to Beryl now, and there was a break in his voice as he took her mother's hand, and asked for her.

"Quite well, and always talking about you," Mrs. Blount said; and such a light came into his face at her words that Miss Blount started, and said to herself that it was all nonsense to call him ugly. There was so much expression in his face that the disfigurement was hardly noticeable.

And so the introduction was made, and an acquaintance inaugurated between the ladies of the Dower House and Lady Digby; and the latter paid a return visit as soon as she could leave Hubert, who was recovering slowly, and was as exacting and selfish as invalids usually are.

"Mrs. Blount and Miss Blount are out, ma'am," was Dormer's answer to the lady's question; "but Miss Beryl is at home, if you would please to walk in."

"I should like to see Miss Beryl very much," the lady said, "that is, if she is willing. Is she afraid of strangers?"

"No ma'am, she is just as if she could see—you would hardly know."

Beryl started from her seat eagerly at the sound of Lady Stretton's name. At last she would have news of him; the time had seemed so long since that delightful day when he had sat beside her in that room, and talked to her, and broken bread with her; and he had promised to come, and she had never seen him since. His dog had come more than once, walked into the house, and sat down beside her as if he would have brought her some message if he could speak. He was there now, to Lady Stretton's great amazement. She caught sight of his great head resting on Beryl's knee as Dormer showed her into the room, and she said, somewhat sharply,—

"My son is not here, is he?"

"No, my lady," Dormer replied—she had recollected herself, and said "ma'am" no more. "He often comes like that, does the dog. Every dumb thing takes to my young lady. Bless her, and she is very fond of a great dog."

Lady Stretton looked for a moment at the sweet inquiring face turned so eagerly towards her, and then she took Beryl's hands and drew her close to her and kissed her. It was an unusual caress for her to bestow; she was not of the gushing order of women, but there was something about Beryl Blount's face that made everyone long to embrace her; just as some people carry about them a certain something that makes other folks' hands tingle to box their ears, and their feet quiver with the desire to administer a kick.

"My dear," Lady Stretton said, gently, "I am so thankful my boy was there to do what he did;" and then she sat down beside the girl, and they were friends from that hour. Beryl chattered away to the stately lady whose advent she had rather dreaded, and listened to all sorts of stories about Stretton Royal and its master till her mother returned, and the conversation turned into a conventional groove, whither she could not follow it.

And Lady Stretton went home and told her son where she had been, and how she had seen the blind girl of whom he had spoken, and Digby looked her straight in the face and said,—

"Then you have seen my future wife, mother."

"Your what?"

"My future wife."

"Do you know who you are talking about, Digby? I was speaking of that poor blind child."

"You were talking about Miss Beryl Blount, the woman to whom, Heaven willing, I am going to offer my hand and heart. Offer, did I say? Ah! me, she has the latter already."

"I think you must be going mad!" Lady Stretton said, in amazement. "She is no wife for you, my son."

"She is a well-born lady, mother; there is never a Stretton on the walls of the old gallery yonder that was anything better."

"But she is blind, Digby—a creature lacking a sense. I there ever a Stretton yonder that was halt, or lame, or blind, or had a blemish of any sort? Think what you are saying. You don't mean it, surely?—a girl you have only seen twice."

"If I had only seen her for one single instant, mother, it was time enough for my heart to claim her as its own. Don't talk of blemishes, dear; I have enough for the whole line of Strettons. Thank Heaven, she cannot see them!"

"But have you asked her, Digby? What does she say?"

"I shall ask her," Sir Digby replied. "If she says me nay, mother—"

"Well, my boy, if she does?"

"I shall never ask another woman while my life lasts. I can't talk about it, mother. I am no lovesick boy falling in love with every girl I meet. I am a man, with a man's

passions and a man's hope, and I have met the woman who shall share my life with me if Heaven wills; if it does not, I will go through the world alone, and let Hubert have my place."

Lady Stretton was sorely troubled about what her son had told her. She knew right well that argument on any subject only made his purpose more firm. He was of age and she had no jurisdiction, and she could not talk to Hubert about it; the least excitement in his weak state would most likely be fatal, the doctors had said, and what would excite him more than the news that his brother contemplated matrimony? Somehow, he had come to look upon himself as the heir. Digby's excessive sensitiveness about his personal appearance would keep him a bachelor, in all probability, and then the place and its revenues would come to him, the handsome scion of a handsome race. What good times he would have when he came into his own! What a house he would keep, and what a name he would make for himself in all the country side!

He was reckoning without his host, this handsome, careless Hubert. Even while he was lying helpless and suffering, the mistress of Stretton Royal was chosen, the wife that was to take her place by her husband's side was coming to oust him and his hopes for ever.

"Do I understand you rightly, Sir Digby? I am afraid not," and Mrs. Blount stared at the baronet, who had asked for an interview with her, as if she thought he had somehow lost his senses.

"I hope you do, madam. I tried to make my meaning plain."

"You ask me to give you my daughter for your wife—my poor blind child?"

"I do. From my heart I entreat you not to turn a deaf ear to my suit. I never thought to care for any woman—that is, I never hoped that any woman would ever care for me—until I met her. Ah! Mrs. Blount, she has come to be the one thing in all the world for me. Do not refuse her to me. I will cherish her and love her as wife was never loved or cherished before. She shall not have an ungratified wish."

"I am sure of that," Mrs. Blount said, somewhat hesitatingly. She was flattered and delighted with the proposal, but she wished it had been to her other daughter, her beautiful Elinor. Poor Beryl could never make a sensation in the world, and she had hoped in a quiet fashion—for she was too much of a lady ever to show that she was husband-hunting for her daughters—that Sir Digby would be fascinated by her lovely Elinor.

"I don't know what to say," she went on. "It is a great temptation to have my child placed for ever above the reach of any trouble that poverty may bring—and I am not a rich woman, Sir Digby—and the greater portion of my income is an annuity that dies with me. But I am thinking of you. Have you thought what it would be to place a helpless creature like my afflicted child at the head of your establishment to—"

"I have thought of everything," he replied, gravely. "What does the establishment signify so we love each other; and I think, I fancy—"

"You have not said anything to her, Sir Digby? You have not told Beryl you love her? She knows nothing of such things as yet. She is as innocent as a child in all love matters. She has been as you see her for many years."

"So she told me. No, Mrs. Blount, I have not spoken to her of my love. I would not startle her sweet innocence by act or word till I had your consent to approach her. Say I may speak to her; let me feel that your blessing goes with my asking, and I shall be the happiest man in all the world."

"You must settle it with Beryl," Mrs. Blount said. "If she does not say you nay,

it is not for me to stand in her light. But, oh! Sir Digby, if her misfortune should bring misfortune on others—if her children should be afflicted like herself—will you not curse me for having yielded to your wishes?"

"Never! Whatever comes of it, I shall thank Heaven for having given me such a blessing. Dear Mrs. Blount, where is she? May I go to her? I want to hear from her own lips that she will try to love me—that my happiness is not all a dream."

"You told him to settle it with Beryl, did you, mamma?" Miss Blount said to her mother, half-an-hour afterwards. "Beryl is disgustingly in love with him and the settlement will not take long. She will say, 'Yes, sir, and thank you for asking,' and be Lady Stretton. Fancy that! Lady Stretton! without the smallest notion of all that such a position means. Mamma, I am a blighted being; I think I shall turn Roman Catholic, and go into a convent!"

"It may be of the greatest use to you, child," Mrs. Blount said. "Lady Stretton's sister will be a person of consequence."

"Not half so much as Lady Stretton herself, mamma. Don't imagine I am jealous of Beryl, poor dear. I wouldn't mind changing places with her, that is all, only I should have to shut my eyes every time Sir Digby came near me. Beryl can't see how ugly he is. I believe she thinks he is the handsomest man in the world."

"Let her think so, my dear," Mrs. Blount said. "She is nervously sensitive, blind though she is, about beauty, and it would give her a shock to tell her that her hero was not an Adonis. Here she comes—a transformed Beryl! My darling child, you look quite radiant!"

"Oh! mamma, mamma!" was all Beryl could say, as she nestled into her mother's arms, and Mrs. Blount fondled her and held her close to her loving heart, and asked her what ailed her.

"Nothing, mamma. I am so happy, that is all. Mamma, he loves me—he says so. He has asked me to be his wife. I once heard a clergyman say that Heaven was all love; I know now it is true!"

CHAPTER V.

There was a shadow over the great joy in Digby Stretton's heart—what joy is there in this world that is not so overshadowed? It was nothing to do with his love; that was as unalloyed and sunshiny as human love can possibly be; but with his brother. Hubert had been in a whirl of money difficulties and entanglements at the time of the accident which had well-nigh killed him, and he confided to his brother that if he didn't absent himself from the country for awhile he would most probably be arrested.

The money matter could be settled, and his brother resolved that it should be without troubling their mother. But there was disgrace attached to it; a scrape into which the handsome prodigal had got himself, and which, if he stayed in the country, would be inevitably exposed. His illness formed a capital excuse for his leaving England for awhile, and Sir Digby resolved to put a bold face on the matter, and get him away before anything like a shadow of the trouble he had brought about should fall on Stretton Royal.

"It shall be the last time, old fellow!" the invalid said, as his brother held his wasted hand, and promised that he should be safe and at ease once more as regarded money within a week. "As I am a living man I will turn over a new leaf from this hour. You shall never have to sigh over me again, or, what is more, you shall never have to shell out any more. The matter shall never shed another tear for me while I live."

"That's a brave Bertie," Sir Digby said. "I hope you will remember your promise when temptation comes, that is all. It is for the mother's sake I have done it this time.

She loves you so dearly, she would break her heart if anything happened to you."

"Or to you," Hubert said, gently. "She loves you just as well, old fellow."

"She shivers when she looks at me sometimes," Sir Digby said, with a smile. "I am not a son for any mother to be proud of. Ah! Bertie, the family honours should have been yours. You have the Stretton beauty and grace. I don't! I have done wrong sometimes."

"As how?"

"In seeking to bring a wife to share my home. Maybe I am bringing a curse upon the old race. My children—"

"Look here," said Hubert, bringing his hand down on his brother's knee with a smack that made Sir Digby start and laugh. "you are getting into one of your old morbid fits. I thought they had flown away altogether, chased out of existence by your inamorate's bright smile and winning words. You are not a Gorgon man that you talk as if you ought to go about in a mask for fear of frightening people; and if you were, your pretty Beryl can't see it."

"No, thank Heaven for that," Sir Digby said. "There is something to be grateful for, after all. She cannot see it, bless her, and she does not know."

"Of course she does not. Who is going to tell her that her husband scarred his face when he was a baby, and behaves like a lunatic about it now he is a man? You will let me see her before I go, will you not? And look here, Digby—"

"Well, my boy, what is it?"

"You will not tell her what a scamp her brother-in-law is, will you? I shall be different when I come back, and she knows me. Don't rake up my transgressions for her benefit, there's a dear boy. I should like her to think well of me."

"She shall; the very best, be sure of that," Sir Digby said. "She shall never know but that her brother-in-law has been a model of propriety and prudence all his life. I shall bring her to see you to-day, so look your very best."

Hubert Stretton thought he had never seen anything so beautiful as the sweet, calm face of the blind girl who was to be his brother's wife, nor heard any music like her gentle voice. Digby left them for a few minutes after he had introduced his brother to Beryl and brought their hands together. Beryl liked to hold the hand of anyone to whom she was introduced. She was almost a thought-reader, and she gleaned a great deal from contact with a hand.

"What is it?" she asked, suddenly, in the midst of their conversation on indifferent subjects; at least, subjects with which they were both conversant.

"Nothing," he replied. "Why?"

"Something started into your mind all at once," she answered. "Your hand gave a throb."

"You are right," he said, looking at her with wondering admiration, "something did come into my mind—a way to serve you."

"To serve me?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I cannot tell you now. I was looking at you, and I thought—Ah! here is Digby," he added, as his brother entered the room. "I have taken the greatest care of her, brother mine. But have you a care, too; she is a witch; she can read men's thoughts through their hands, and guess their inmost minds from a touch."

"No she can't," Beryl said; and Lady Stretton coming in at the moment the subject was dropped, and, as far as Beryl was concerned, almost forgotten; and Bertie, the bright darling of them all, was now from suffering, and wasted to a shadow, went away, and was not amongst the pleasant company at his brother's wedding. He was gone to some celebrated German baths; but the name of the place was not mentioned,

and Sir Digby looked rather grave when he came back from escorting him, after an absence of a few days, which had seemed like months to Beryl, to whom he had come to be all in all.

It was a very quiet wedding. No one wanted to make a display of the bride's infirmity, and they went to the little church just outside the Park gates, and took each other "for better for worse, for richer for poorer," with only their own immediate friends to witness their happiness. There was no wedding tour. What need when the bride could not see and did not care for being seen? It was a glorious honeymoon to her to come to her new home, and learn her way about, and familiarise herself with her fresh surroundings. If Lady Stretton lamented in secret before the marriage over her son's choice, and bewailed to herself the introduction of a blind mistress to Stretton Royal, she soon forgot that she had ever objected, in the love that grew in her heart for her new daughter. It did not seem as if Beryl were blind; she was so self-reliant and fearless. She soon learned to go about with only Lion for a guide, and it would have been bad for anyone to have laid a finger on her while the big dog was near.

And so two months of happiness went by—happiness such as Digby Stretton had never dreamed of—a very foretaste of Paradise, and then there came a shadow. He never knew when it began. It was a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but it was there. Beryl had a secret—something that she was keeping from him. She was as loving and gentle as ever, her face lighted up with all its old radiance when he came near her; but she had something in her mind which she did not share with him. More than once he had surprised her in tears, and when he had questioned her, she had said nothing at all, and broken away from him to cry still more in her own room.

Once he had come upon her and Dormer busy over a letter. The woman was reading it to her, and her face was all one glow of eager expectation and delight. There was no mistaking the expression, but the sound of his footstep changed it to unmistakable fear. He asked Dormer about it, but that independent personage only replied that the letter was her lady's, and it was not for her to talk about it. He asked Beryl herself, and she shirked the subject, and would not give him any straightforward answer; but she seemed frightened, and shrank from him when he would have drawn her close to him and talked to her gently and lovingly; and Digby, poor self-tormenting soul, took it into his head that she was weary of him and afraid of him, and all sorts of ridiculous notions, and brooded and bemoaned himself, and behaved a jealous man will, and never sought counsel from any one, not even his mother. She loved Beryl so dearly, he said to himself, that it would never do to let her have even a suspicion that all was not right. They had been scarcely three months married when his suspicions were confirmed in such a fashion that he wished himself dead in his angry grief.

One morning the post brought to Stretton Royal two letters—that is, only two of which he took any cognisance. There was the usual amount of correspondence, business and otherwise, lady-like letters to his mother, and all sorts of missives for himself, as master of the house. One, a foreign-looking missive, was laid on his heap, and another, also foreign in appearance, was placed beside Beryl. Dormer was beside her at the moment, and took the letter at a movement from her young mistress.

"You have made a mistake, Dormer, or, rather, the butler has," Sir Digby said. "That letter is for my mother."

"No, sir," she replied, "it is for my lady."

"I am going mad," Digby Stretton said to himself. "It was in Hubert's handwriting."

Beryl was strangely agitated at the receipt of that letter, whatever it contained, and that

she knew something of what it was about was evident from her trembling hands and quivering lips. Yet she had not read it or heard it read, for it was in Dormer's pocket.

"Shall I not read your letter to you, darling?" her husband said presently, when Dormer had left the room for a minute, and a curious terror came into her face at his words.

"Not this one; oh! not this," she said, with a sort of gasp. "Any other but this one; don't ask me, dear, don't ask me!"

"I won't if you do not wish it," he said, gently, if somewhat coldly; "but it is hardly fair or politic to confide in a servant what you conceal from me, Beryl."

"Ah! you don't know—you don't know!" she said, the tears falling down her cheeks. Trust me, Digby dear, and don't be angry with me for not telling you."

"Please yourself," he said. "I have no wish to pry into any secrets that you wish to keep;" and so saying he walked out of the room with his own letters in his hand, and shut himself in his study to read them.

The foreign one was a surprise and a shock. It told him of the death of a relation in the West Indies, and of his own accession to a considerable fortune. It would be well, the letter said, if Sir Digby Stretton could arrange to come out and see to the business himself. There was likely to be a claim set up by an illegitimate son of the deceased gentleman, and matters generally were at sixes and sevens.

"I cannot go," Digby said to himself. "How can I leave home and Beryl? and I could not take my darling with me. Where is she, I wonder?"

The news had almost driven the suspicious kiter that Beryl had received out of his head.

He went to seek her, and came upon her unawares in a favourite nook of the private garden. Her attendant was with her, and they were talking earnestly, with their heads together.

"I am quite ready," he heard Beryl say; "ready to go this very day. Oh! Dormer, if we could only get rid of Sir Digby, we would start at once."

Start! Where to? Where could his blind wife be wanting to go and without him? The two moved away as he watched, and left a torn piece of paper lying where they had been sitting. The baronet took it up and his fears were confirmed; it was part of the envelope of the letter, and it was directed in his brother's handwriting. He had not been mistaken—he thought he knew Hubert's free, sprawling hand. What could he have to write to Beryl about?

"Dear Hubert!" The words came distinctly to his ear in his wife's voice, and then a warning "Hush, my lady," from Dormer.

Ah! he would go to Jamaica—he was not wanted here. Fool that he had been to think that there was any chance of happiness for him. Even a woman who could not see turned against him. Only three months, and his happiness was over!

So he talked to himself, working himself up with every passing moment till he had built up a pile of jealousy and hurt feeling big enough to make him do anything.

"I shall go, mother," he said to the Dowager Lady Stretton, when he showed her the letter. "I don't fancy I shall be much missed."

"What do you mean?" she asked, coldly, as it seemed to him.

"I mean that I—that Beryl—that I don't think my wife will miss me much," he said, incoherently, and his mother smiled to herself, but answered him quietly and gently.

"I don't know what you have got into your head, Digby!" she said. "Beryl will grieve as much as you could possibly desire at any separation from you."

"Yet she is anxious to get rid of me. I heard her say so."

"I think you may trust your wife in all things," Lady Stretton said. "Leave her to me, my boy. If you have any fancy regarding

her shake it off; you will be sorry for it. Make up your mind when you will travel, and make haste back. The clouds will all be dissipated by the time you return, and you will wonder at yourself for ever having let them gather."

He thought his mother's manner rather odd, and he left her without telling her anything about the letter that had aroused his suspicions. She loved Hubert so dearly and he had repaid her so badly, in some instances, that he could not bear to give her pain.

"I will go," he said. "Perhaps I shall be drowned, killed, lost or something. If I am, there will be an end of it and of me. Oh! Beryl, my darling, my darling! I could have borne anything but this—anything but this!"

CHAPTER VI.

"DEAR Hubert!" How the words seemed to ring in Digby Stretton's ears, as he sat communing with himself, and trying to take comfort from his mother's words! He recalled everything that Hubert had said to him about his wife after that interview; how he had told him Beryl was an angel, and declared that he envied him his happiness; and he recollected now how Hubert had seen Beryl again. Dormer had taken her to his room, and she had been there alone; he had not noticed or cared at the time. But now, what did it all mean? They were in correspondence; and his wife blushed and was agitated at the mention of his careless brother's name. He had heard her with his own ears declare that she was ready to go—where? She, who could not stir abroad without Dormer or someone with her—she wanted to get rid of him, wished he would go away that she, too, might go.

"Dear Hubert!" How her voice had softened and taken a new and strange tenderness as he spoke the name, unconscious that her husband was within hearing. Poor, passionate Sir Digby! Conscious of his own ugliness, and making sure that Beryl had found her mistake—had heard that her husband was almost a Gorgon—what should he do? The very tone of her voice, as she spoke to him that morning, had been altered. It was petulant and impatient; and Dormer, too, had spoken to him with what seemed undisguised contempt, as she refused to give him the letter that had come for her mistress.

Beryl had admitted there was a secret, and he knew it was one that his brother shared with her—his younger brother, his mother's favourite, and the one who could always win a woman with his glib tongue, and sweet, wheedling ways. How had he come between them? How had he managed to work upon his blind wife? That he had done so was only too apparent; and he, Digby Stretton, the master of this old place, and the richest man in all the country side, was the most miserable man in existence.

Common-sense whispered "Go and talk to Beryl, seek her, and have an understanding with her, and, above all, trust her;" but common-sense was routed and sent to the wall by passionate jealousy and fancied hideousness and unworthiness, and was crowded out of court altogether. A passionate, loving heart wrung by a slight, either real or imaginary, has no sense; and Digby Stretton hugged his misery, and hid it as the Spartan boy hid the fox, and smiled while it lacerated him.

Leaves it to his mother! 'Aye, would he? He would go to Jamaica, and perchance never come back again. He was cowardly in his sorrow, and had not courage enough to grapple with the evil. He would tell Beryl he was going, and bid her adieu, and leave her the rest. A bitter cloud had come over his happiness; he could better bear the darkness if he were far away.

His wife was in her own room when he sought her, alone, her fingers straying idly over the keys of her piano. Music was at all times a solace and amusement to her.

She was singing softly to herself, and did not hear him enter—a rare thing for her—for her ears made up for her eyes, she was apt to say, and was singularly acute, as blind people's ears generally are.

It was not till he touched her shoulder that she was conscious of his presence, and then she looked up at him with a puzzled expression.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"What should be the matter?" he said, gravely; "why do you ask?"

"There was no love in your touch," she said, gently. "Ah! Digby, you are angry with me, and I cannot help it."

"Yes, you can; you can tell me what it is that you are keeping secret from me. Why you have letters that I may not read?—letters from—"

He checked himself. He would not introduce Hubert's name now; he could not trust himself to speak of his brother yet.

"Yes, I did have a letter," Beryl said, quietly, and with a curious determination in her pretty face, "and I do refuse to tell you anything about it. My darling, can you not trust me?"

"I must, since you give me no alternative."

She had no idea of what his suspicions were; she could not read the distrust in his eyes, nor the wild look that came into his face at her words.

"As you will," he said, coldly, after a pause, during which she sat wondering why he did not speak to her. "You will not be tried with the effort of keeping anything from me long. I am going away!"

"Going away!"

She echoed his words like someone in a dream, and her face turned very pale; but there was a look on it in the midst of her surprise of relief and satisfaction. She was glad he was going—he could see it, he was sure of it. His presence was irksome to her now, her fancy had faded. Ah, well! it was not her fault, maybe. It was the fortune of men like him never to be loved for themselves alone.

She had been told what a position hers would be if she married him, and—Bah! it would not bear thinking about. He would go and let the rest take care of itself. He should be able to think when he was away; he could only torment himself with rage and despair now that she was so near him.

"Yes," he said; "going away. You will not mind."

"Not mind! Oh, Digby! half myself will be gone if you leave me. But where are you going? and why? You did not tell me anything about it this morning."

"I only knew of the necessity this morning. I am going to Jamaica. I have inherited some property there, and I must go and see after it."

To Jamaica! And he could stand there and tell her of it in that cold, hard fashion without taking her into his arms and kissing her, or telling her how sorry he was to go! Perhaps he was not sorry. Perhaps she had wearied him with her helplessness and childish ways. She was very childish—her sister was always telling her so.

"You are not sorry to go," she said. "I can hear that in your voice."

"It is better that I should do so," he replied. "And you, Beryl, you can do without me. I think you are not sorry either. It will leave you free. I heard you say you wished it, only an hour ago—you were talking to Dormer."

Beryl was very white now. He was trying her too hardly.

"Did you hear all I said to Dormer?" she asked. "Were you listening?"

"No, dear. What I heard was by chance. I heard my wife wish that she could get rid of me; she has her wish now. I shall tomorrow if possible."

"And for how long? Ah! Digby, cruel to come and tell me this so suddenly. What shall I do without you?"

She broke down now and burst into passion-

ate weeping, and he took her in his arms and held her close to him.

"You will be quite safe," he said. "You will have my mother, and your own mother and sister, and Dormer."

"But I shall not have you," she said, and then suddenly after a pause, "how long shall you be away Digby?"

"Three months, I daresay."

Again that curious look of satisfaction that he had marked in her face before. She could not conceal her feelings, and he could read her speaking face like a book. She was glad he was going. There was no doubt of it; she wanted to be free.

"Three months! I daresay," she exclaimed, "three whole months! Oh! Digby, it seems like an eternity."

"It will pass over," he replied, quietly; "an end will come to my absence and to all other things. Beryl, my darling, don't let me go thinking I have made a mistake and spoiled your life. Tell me what it is that you are keeping from me, and why you are glad that we are to be separated?"

"Spoiled my life!" she repeated. "Digby, are you going out of your senses? Life has been Heaven to me since I have been your wife till—"

"Till what? She stopped suddenly, and her face whitened. Till someone came between them was the interpretation he put upon her words, and he hardened his heart, and spoke coldly enough in answering her.

"Only for a little while, I am afraid," he said. "Perhaps Heaven will come back when I am gone, Beryl?"

"I don't understand you," she said, her face flushing now, as his bitterness became apparent in his tone. "We are misunderstanding each other, I think."

"Perhaps we are. I think I understand myself if I do not my wife. I shall go to-morrow, if possible. Think if there is anything you want me to do or arrange for you before then. I should like to think I left you happy, Beryl, in case of anything happening to me."

"If anything happened to you, Digby, nothing in this world would make me happy; you know that," Beryl said. "I don't know what you have taken into your head concerning me; but whatever it is, if it is anything wrong I can give the lie to it with a fearless heart. I have never knowingly done anything to merit even your passing displeasure."

"Tell me what you are keeping from me, and I will believe you."

"I will not," she said, angrily, her temper roused now; and without another word she rose silently and made her way out of the room.

And so these two, playing at cross-purposes, were to part for a long time. Digby Stretton was to cross the sea, maybe never to return, if winds and waves were adverse. And Beryl was to stay where she was, and grieve over his hardness and want of faith in her. It was her first sorrow, poor child, and one that she could not tell to anyone. Digby doubted her, Digby suspected her of some wrong-doing. She could not see, poor child, that her own conduct had led to the suspicion, and that her husband's over-sensitiveness had made a mountain of it; and she let him go, knowing nothing of the tempest that was raging in his heart, and fanning that she had concealed from him the very thing that he had found out—that it was Hubert who shared her secret.

And the mischief grew and spread. A word let fall by Sir Digby in his agitation had been caught up by a servant, and, somehow, the rumour made its way through the house that Sir Digby was jealous of my lady. It found its way to Mrs. Blount's ears, who thereupon went to her daughter, and demanded an explanation; but Beryl had none to give her. She was reserved and strange in her manner, and would not answer her mother's questions, and the Dowager had nothing to say upon the subject at all. She was quite sure that there was nothing of the sort, was all she deigned to say. She could trust her

son, and she hoped that Mrs. Blount had a sufficiently good opinion of her daughter to listen to no such nonsense.

"They must think what they please," she said to herself, after her interview with her son's mother-in-law, "I cannot meddle in it, I have given my word not to; they must take their own way."

Rumour does not stay at home when she has any business on hand. She flew far and wide with the mischief with which she was laden now—flew even to Jamaica, in a letter to a gentleman on a neighbouring estate to the one where Digby Stretton was setting things straight, and preparing to return home.

"The silly season has begun," the writer said, "and all sorts of gossip and scandal fill the papers as usual. Amongst other items I saw a paragraph hinting that something was wrong at Stretton Royal. Sir Digby is your next neighbour out yonder. A whisper is going about that his blind wife has left her home, with whom or for what is not stated. Anyway, she is not at her husband's country house, and the Dowager is in London alone. I hear she repudiates all knowledge of her daughter-in-law's whereabouts, but one never knows quite what to believe. Another on dit is that her younger son is coming back—he went away under a cloud some time since."

The letter was put into Sir Digby's hand to read. He had struck up an acquaintance with the gentleman on the next estate, and he thought he was doing right in letting him know what was being said about him and his during his absence.

"Of course it is not true," he said, "but you may be able to do something to stop such idle rumours. I suffered myself once grievously through being far away when an idle report got about concerning me, and if I had only been aware of it I could have explained everything satisfactorily."

"Thank you very much," the Baronet said. "No, it is not true. I must get back and set things straight, whatever has gone wrong, and I am afraid something has. It is not that."

And in his heart he believed that it was—he felt that the wicked tale was true. Beryl gone! Beryl not at home! Where could she be? But—bah! he must not think of it, he must keep his brain clear, and go home—go back to his desolate hearth, and bear his life hereafter as best he might. He had not heard from his mother for a long time; doubtless she did not know how to write to him after such a misfortune had fallen upon them all.

CHAPTER VII.

Snow was lying thick upon the ground when Digby Stretton returned from his exile and set foot on English ground once more. The dying leaves had been falling around him when he set out, with bitterness in his heart, to take possession of his new estates.

His business had been satisfactorily accomplished, and he was coming home a far richer man than when he went away—rich in worldly goods, as it seemed, in mockery of his heart-sickness. What was wealth to him if all he fancied was true? What was all the luxury and glitter in the world if Beryl was not left to him?

He had heard from her once or twice before the terrible tale that had come through his neighbour, but her letters were, of necessity, laboured and short. She could write, but she was more or less at the mercy of other people in her correspondence; and for the last few weeks even those unsatisfactory evidences of her affection had ceased.

His mother had written too, but so curiously that he could gather nothing from her letters, and he had only replied to her last by the announcement of his speedy return.

"No need to enter into any particulars with her," he said to himself; "I will go back unannounced, and see for myself what is going on."

And while he was rushing through the country with a heart as heavy as the leaden clouds that filled the sky, Beryl and her mother-in-law sat in the small drawing-room at Stretton Royal with eager and loving expectation in both their faces.

"Mamma, when can he be here?" asked Beryl. "I feel as if I should go mad."

"My dear, do try and be calm, you will do yourself a mischief. Recollect you are to be very careful about excitement."

"Yes, I know, mamma; but who would not be excited at such a time? To think that my darling is coming, and that I—mamma, I must have a good cry, or I shall scream and do something dreadful."

"My dear Beryl, my dear child, do remember what the doctor said, 'above all, no tears.' Try and be quiet, dear; you may undo the work of weeks in an hour, and then what will he say?"

"What will he say altogether, I wonder?" Beryl said, softly.

And then she sighed, a little sigh of apprehension as it seemed; and, rising from her seat by the fire, began to pace the room impatiently.

She was wonderfully altered; there was a firmness and decision about her step, and a look of interest in her face that had not been there when her husband left her; and her eyes, always bright, were full of life and keenness now.

"Do I fidget you?" she asked, presently.

"No, dear; if I were not an old woman I should do the same, I daresay. I am quite as excited as you are. Both my darlings are coming home to-night, remember that."

"I don't forget it, mamma. I do so long to see Hubert."

She talked of "seeing" as most blind folks do, and Lady Stretton smiled as she heard the word.

She was a happy woman that dull evening. The cloud that had hung over her youngest darling was lifted at last, and Hubert was free to come home, with all his debts wiped out, and his wild oats all sown—at least, he declared the latter to be the fact—and his mother believed him, as she had believed him many a time and oft before.

"Mother, dear, where are you? Where is Beryl?"

The voice sounded loud and clear through the house, and Beryl started up with a wild scream.

"He is come!" she cried; "my love, my darling!" and before Lady Stretton could interpose a word she had rushed out of the room and down the staircase.

And this was what Digby Stretton saw when he came home that winter night.

He would not take a conveyance from the nearest town; he left his luggage to come on after him and walked. It was only about a mile, and he would surprise them all. There should be no time for preparation of either faces or speech, and in one moment he would see—would know—whether his suspicions were true or false. Doubtless Hubert was at home before this, he had heard nothing more about him. Ah, well! if he were, he might stay there; he might have Stretton Royal and all in it for aught he cared. He would go away across the sea again, and hide his luck so hard amongst the hills and valleys of his new possessions.

No one saw him enter the park; the gate at the lodge was open, and the woman had just admitted some one who walked through as if he had a right to be there—a gentleman with a small bag in his hand, and a comforter twisted lightly round his neck.

"My brother," Sir Digby said to himself, and followed him with swift, silent steps that kept up with him unseen till he was admitted into the house.

The brother outside heard the glad welcome of the servants, and stepped aside for a moment to collect his thoughts.

The conservatory was ruddy with lights, and Hubert stepped in there, throwing aside

his wraps, and calling out cheerfully to his mother and Beryl.

Then he saw her—he, the husband, that stood outside in the cold and darkness—come into the room with a fleet step, as if the sound of his voice was sufficient guide, and throw herself into his arms, nestling on his breast as if her place was there, and turning her face up to his with loving tenderness.

He could hear her words, too, for some one had left a pane open, and her voice came out on the night air clear and distinct.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" he heard her say, "come at last! My handsome love!"

And then she pressed kisses on his face as though she would never have her fill, and clung to him, and wept in her joyous excitement, till his brain seemed as if it were on fire as he looked at her and him.

He heard his brother laugh gaily, and then he saw, as if in a mist, many people come into the conservatory.

He did not see his mother, though she was there, but he saw a man, a stranger to him, come and speak to Hubert, and then all seemed to grow dark round him, and when he recovered his wits the flowers and waving trees were the only things to be seen behind the glass.

The actors in the scene he had witnessed had all disappeared, as if he had dreamed it; but it was no dream.

There were Hubert's hat and scarf just as he had thrown them down. He was there, and it was to him, his false and ungrateful brother, that his wife had come—it was in his arms she had lain, and her lips had murmured words of greeting to him that of right belonged only to him, her husband.

What need for him to wait for more terrible evidence that he was forgotten when the sound of his brother's voice could bring her unguided, unaided, to his arms like that?

He would go as he had come. Stretton Royal should see him no more, and he would write to his mother, and make arrangements for—

Ah! he must not think of it! He must not let himself speak of it or he should go mad—mad! and then he should, maybe, shriek out his misery to all the world, and shame her! He would go—anywhere!

It was five o'clock now. There was yet time for him to reach the boat. He would go on the Continent—anywhere—and try and steady himself enough to think what his future course should be; but he must put the sea between him and his brother, or he might go back and forget everything but his great wrong and his life long sorrow.

"Pardon me, sir; should you not put this on?"

Some one was speaking to him as he sat on the deck of the steamer that was ploughing her way through a somewhat turbulent sea to the port of Flushing.

He was not aware that he had not put on his overcoat, and that he was lying across his knees while the sharp wind whistled round him, and his teeth were all chattering with the cold.

He looked up and saw a gentleman, well suited up, standing by his side.

"Your pardon, sir," he said, in a pleasant voice, though with something like a foreign accent in it. "I am a little of a doctor, among other things, and I do not like to see any man trifling with his life. It is no night to sit without an overcoat when one has got one to put on."

"Thank you," Sir Digby said, rising, and accepting his proffered help to get into the neglected garment. "I was hardly thinking of what I was doing. I was—"

"Full of sadness. I see it in your face."

"Yes—full of overflowing."

"And I am so full of joy to-night!" He was a lequacious person—this pleasant faced foreigner. "Full of joy and thankfulness, and

I would have everyone the same if I could—if I knew how."

"Ah, you have reason, perhaps."

"That I have, I have, under Heaven, brought happiness and new life to a sweet lady—to a whole family. Ah, you are listening to me! I am glad to see life come into your eyes, for I thought—"

He stopped for a minute, looking at Sir Digby, as if irresolute whether to go on or not.

"Thought what?"

"I thought, pardon me, that you looked, as you sat there, as if you were half-inclined to try whether yonder water would bring you oblivion. I have seen that look in a human face before more than once, and each time it has meant death."

"Are you a wizard that you can read a person's thoughts?"

"No; but I can see I have read yours. Again I say, pardon me, and come down into the cabin, out of sight of that boiling sea."

Sir Digby suffered himself to be led downstairs, and the gentleman, rightly divining that he was well-nigh exhausted, ordered refreshments to be brought, and persuaded him to take some.

"I don't know you," the Baronet said, when a little brandy-and-water brought back some of his flagging energies. "But whoever you may be I thank you. You have done a great service. I was thinking as you say. You have exorcised the fiend for a time, at any rate."

"For which I thank Heaven!" the stranger said. "Now try a cigar. You smoke? Ah, that is better. So do I?" and he pulled out his card-case, and with it an envelope, which fell at Sir Digby's feet. "It is nothing private," the gentleman said, "only a portrait, but the loveliest face I ever saw. See!" and he put it into the Baronet's hand—a portrait of Beryl.

A speaking likeness, but with a look he had never seen in her face—the look he had marked there as she ran down to spring into his brother's arms.

"You know this lady?" he gasped, staring at the stranger who had given it to him.

"Know her? Surely I am Dr. Erasmus Glück, at your service, and the lady has been a patient of mine for some weeks. The most successful case I ever treated. I have only left her to-night. I have been treated like a prince, and made to feel as if I were a dear friend instead of a doctor, who worked for a fee like any other man."

"Tell me!" entreated the Baronet. "Let me hear all about it! I—I know the lady!"

"Know her? Then you know an angel! She was blind—you know that?"

"Was blind! Is she—can she see?"

"As well as you can. Listen. Her husband had a brother—a what-do-you-call-it—a scapegrace—who knew me in Germany some time ago, and knew also of a cure I made in a similar case. When he saw his brother's wife he told her, and it became a plan between them all—the brother and the mother and the lady herself—that she should try what I could do to cure her, saying nothing to her husband. He loved her so dearly, and she adored him so truly, that she made up her mind to keep the secret till all should be over for well or ill, lest they might unnerve each other by their anxiety. It was to be a surprise to him when it was done, but there was a difficulty in the way. It was necessary that the young lady should come to Germany to me and be under my sole charge for a month at least. They did not know how to manage that part of it at all."

"But it was managed?"

"Yes. As if Heaven had interposed to bring it all about the husband was called away to see about some property in a foreign country, and the brother made all the arrangements, and the lady and her attendant came to me at Wiesbaden, and put themselves into my hands. She was a model patient—she was so anxious to do all she could to help her own cure, 'for his sake.' She always whispered

to me when we talked together, and she was never tired of talking of her husband, whom she had never seen. There was one thing that had never been explained to her, I found, and that was what her husband was like. The attendant, a shrewish woman, but wonderfully sharp and active, told me that he was a curiously, ugly man; his face being distorted in some way through an accident, but he was the best of men. I thought my patient ought to be told, but it was no business of mine, and I said nothing, and there came of it a funny mistake."

"A mistake!" Sir Digby wondered if that were indeed his own voice that was speaking. "What mistake?"

"Oh! it was all set right; but it was odd, though I feared for a little time what the effect might be. A week ago I took the young lady home, and I found that both her husband and his brother were expected about the same time. She had never seen the brother, though he had made all the arrangements for her stay with me. I would not let her see anybody or anything till the proper time came. She had kept her secret. At the cost of a good deal of unpleasantness to herself, I found, when we got to England, she was even suspected of having run away from her husband, but she will live all that down when she has him by her side and can tell him all about it. I have been at her house ever since, and this evening the brother came back. She heard his voice and mistook it for her husband's—they are alike in that respect, I am told—and she took possession of him, and flung herself into his arms before anyone could stop her. She was sadly distressed when she found out her mistake, but she has got over it by this time, for doubtless he has arrived ere this. He was hourly expected. I wanted much to see him, but I had to leave to-night. I have a critical case to look to to-morrow, and I must have a steady hand and no fatigue in my eyes when I go to it."

"Fool! fool!" gasped Digby Stretton, realising the truth now, and springing from his seat; "what a blind, dotting ass I must have been! No, I am not going mad, Dr. Glück. I thought I had seen your face somewhere. It was in the conservatory; you came in and spoke to my brother. Can you not guess who I am? I am the man you have been talking about, that lady's husband, Digby Stretton."

"H'm, I think I understand," the German oculist said to himself, as he laid his companion down on the settee for a moment, for the cabin was whirling round with Sir Digby, and he would have fallen but for the doctor's arm. "Courage, mon ami, you will get a boat back from Flushing if we are lucky enough to be in to our time, and you can get home before your absence has been extended enough to give them much uneasiness."

The officials at Flushing must have thought the tall Englishman with the white face was certainly a madman, for he scrambled from one boat to the other without so much as going ashore for a moment, and started on his homeward journey after a brief handclasp, and some grateful words to his new acquaintance.

It was late the next day when he presented himself, wan and travel-worn, at the lodge gate, and nearly frightened the good woman who kept it into a fit by his sudden appearance.

"Lord ha' mercy, sir!" she exclaimed, "I'm thankful to see you this day; there's news come about your luggage, and my lady is in a terrible way."

"But she is well, Sally? They are all well?"

"Yes! they're well, Sir Digby, but troubled about you. My lady has been taking on terrible this morning, Mr. Stretton says, and it makes them afraid for her eyes and for the baby when it comes; for you see, Sir Digby, she's gone through a lot, poor dear, and—"

"Here, get out of the way," the Baronet said, flinging her a sovereign, and leaving her

talking at a great rate, while he sped up the avenue as fast as his legs would carry him. He seemed as if he should never reach the house, as if the long stretch of fine old trees were lengthening themselves out interminably. But he did reach it at last, and was standing in the dining-room with his brother's hand clasped in his own almost before he knew now he got into the house.

"Beryl," he said, "my wife—where is she?"

In his arms and nestling to his heart almost before the words were well out of his mouth, and his mother too, with tears of joy in her haughty eyes, and all the miserable past would come to be as a dream.

"I was detained, dear," was all the explanation he gave to Beryl absent his absence, "you shall know how some day."

But it was not till three months had gone by, and she was sitting by his side with a tiny pink creature in her arms that he told her of what had happened to him that miserable night; and how, but for his chance meeting with the German doctor who had restored her sight, they two might have gone apart to their lives' end, each misunderstanding the other.

"Add I should never have known how they exaggerated when they said you were ugly, Digby, dear!" Beryl said, laying her soft cheek on the hand that rested on her shoulder. "It is a base libel; my husband is a very good-looking man, and the baby will be just like his father."

"Heaven forbid," was Sir Digby's pious ejaculation; "one in a family is enough. Ah, Beryl! if you had not been blind I doubt you would never have chosen me."

But Beryl says she should, and I think she speaks the truth.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

A MAN is always a fool. If he be young, the world says, "When he is older he will know more." If he be older, it says, "He is old enough to know better," and when he is old, it says, "There is no kind of fool equal to an old fool."

GERMAN REPARTER.—A Frenchman said to a Berliner, "Your Iron Cross, the highest Prussian Order, is simple ridiculous—it has an intrinsic value of scarce five soua." To which the native of the Prussian capital replied, "I don't deny it; but it has nevertheless cost you two Napoleons."

"Do you play very much nowadays, Miss Smith?" he asked, as they seated themselves after a wait. "Only occasionally," she replied. "I have neglected my music shamefully of late, and am getting quite out of practice." "I was passing your house last evening," he went on, "and stood at the gate a moment to hear you play. Instead of getting out of practice I think you are improving—it any improvement is possible," he added, politely. "Last evening?" she questioned. "Yes, about nine o'clock." "You are mistaken. I was at the opera last evening," she said, in a strained voice, as she accepted an invitation to dance from another gentleman. "It was the man tuning the piano you heard."

NICE NEWS FOR HIS ADMIRERS.—A short time ago the following occurred in a country newspaper. It had been speaking in high terms of a new tenor—a rare *avis*, who had delighted and entranced all hearers. The criticism was elaborate; but it finished by saying, "He was sentenced to five years imprisonment, so that society will for some time be freed from the infliction of his presence." This extraordinary assertion was simply owing to the fact that the end of a trial had been added to the bottom of the notice of the tenor, to which it formed such an inappropriate pendant.

It may seem paradoxical, but it is, nevertheless, true, that a man cannot smoke a cigar too short unless he smokes it too long.

A COMMITTEE appointed by the Paris Academy has examined and rejected no fewer than two hundred and forty "infallible nostrums" for curing and arresting the progress of cholera.

"No, sir!" thundered an irate father—"no, sir! My daughter never can be yours!" To which the young man quietly replied: "I don't want her to be my daughter; I want her to be my wife."

APPROPRIATE GAMES.—For entomologists, cricket; for chorepodsists, foot-ball; for bishops, lawn-tennis; for punsters, skit-ties; for indolent people, nap; for toddy-drinkers, bowls; for roughs, racket.

FATHER (angrily): "You have been in the water; you were fishing." SON: "Yes, I was in the water, but I got a boy out who might have been drowned." FATHER: "Indeed! who was it?" SON: "Myself."

PATIENT: "Sir, you put me in a set of false teeth." DENTIST: "I remember." PATIENT: "You promised they would be just like natural teeth." DENTIST: "No doubt." PATIENT: "But your false teeth give me a deal of pain." DENTIST: "An exact imitation of nature?"

"COLONEL," said a man, who wanted to make out a genealogical tree—"colonel, how can I become thoroughly acquainted with my family history?" "Simply by running for president," answered the colonel.

"GEORGE, dear," said a sweet young wife to her husband, "I've had a talk with the servants this morning, and have agreed to raise their wages. They said everything was so dear now—rent was high, and meat and butter had risen to such a price—in fact, everything. I thought this was reasonable, because I've so often heard you complain of the same thing."

TIMOTHY.—A young lawyer was retained as advocate in a case as to which, not feeling himself sufficiently prepared to plead, he was very desirous of obtaining a postponement. As, however, the court had already protracted its session beyond the usual period, in consequence of an unusual amount of business, and as the jury were getting impatient to be released from their duress, he was well aware that it would be impossible to procure such a postponement unless he could allege some extraordinary cause. Fortunately—or unfortunately, as the result proved—he had a lively imagination, and quickly formed a plan which he was sure would be successful. Rising, with his handkerchief to his eyes, he addressed the court in great apparent emotion. "May it please the court, I have just heard of the dangerous illness of my venerable mother, who is lying at the point of death. In such circumstances, much as I regret protracting an already lengthened session, I must request that this case be postponed. My feelings are so powerfully agitated that I should be unable to do justice to the case, feeling as I do that my proper place is at the bedside of my mother." The pathetic appeal was completely successful. A feeling of earnest sympathy for the afflicted counsel filled all hearts, and the jurors, though anxious to return to their families, were not sufficiently hard of heart to wish to have the business of the court proceed at such a sacrifice of personal feelings. The judge, who was a tender-hearted man, had risen, and was about to grant the request of the counsel, when the deep hush was broken by a shrill voice which proceeded from a lady in a Quaker bonnet, who was bending over the railing of the gallery. It was the mother of the eloquent counsel, who, so far from being at the point of death, came, without her son's knowledge, to hear him plead. "Timothy, Timothy," she exclaimed, in a voice which could be heard all over the court, "how often have I chastised thee for lying!" The case was not postponed.

FOND MAMMA: "Well, doctor, how do you like Angelina's dress?" DOCTOR: "What there is of it, ma'am, is admirable for our business at this season of the year."

A GENTLEMAN having a deaf servant was advised by a friend to discharge her. "No, no," replied the gentleman, with much good feeling; "that poor creature could never hear of another situation."

A LAD who had been bathing was in the act of dressing himself, when one of his shoes rolled down the rocks and disappeared in the water. In his attempt to rescue it he lost the other one also, whereupon, contemplating his feet with a most melancholy expression, he apostrophized: "Well, you are a nice pair of orphans, ain't you?"

An advertisement appeared lately as follows: "For sale, a very rare postage-stamp, time of Henry VIII." A correspondent, calling the advertiser's attention to the fact that there were no postage stamps at that time, received for answer, "That is the reason the stamp is so rare."

The latest craze for fashionable young ladies is hammering brass. This may be very nice for a young lady, but it must be very trying to a young man's cheek.

YOUNG HOPESBY says the worse trait possessed by his girl's father is his proneness to misconstrue plain, practical questions. (When he asked for his daughter's hand, the father gave him his foot.)

A RASHFUL youth, confronted with the contingency of having to "speak to the old man about her," was heard to remark: "After a fellow pops, then pops the fellow that worries him most."

"SEE here. I'd like to know when you are going to pay me that bill you owe me. I've run as long as I proposed." "Well, let the bill run a little while now."

A DELICATE DIFFERENCE.—She: "What a lovely night it is! If you feel like smoking, George, light a cigar; I do not object." He: "Thank you, but I will not take advantage of your generosity. The fact is, there is no satisfaction in smoking in the dark." She: "How strange!" He: "It is rather odd, but it is fact that a cigar is not a luxury unless one can see the smoke." She: "Smoking is different from kissing, isn't it?" He took the hint.

THE NEW WAY.—Not long since Mr. J. Russell Lowell was present at a dinner at which he did not expect to speak, and hence he was not prepared. Towards the end of the feast, however, the obsequious toast master approached him and put into his hand the usual slip of paper, which in nine cases out of ten provokes immediate indisposition. In real or feigned horror, the American Minister exclaimed, "What! am I to speak? Why on earth didn't you give me notice?" "Bless you!" replied the toast-master, "we never do. If we were to we should have a gentleman talking all night."

WHILE Verdi was putting the finishing touches upon *Il Trovatore* he was visited in his study by a privileged friend, who was one of the ablest living musicians and critics. The latter was permitted to glance over the score and try the "Anvil Chorus" on the pianoforte. "What do you think of that?" asked the master. "Trash!" said the connoisseur. Verdi rubbed his hands and chuckled. "Now look at this, and this, and this," he said. "Rabbi!" The composer rose and embraced his friend with a burst of joy. "What do you mean by such strange conduct?" asked the critical one. "My dear friend," responded the master, "I have been composing a 'popular opera.' In it I resolved to please everybody except the great judges and classicists like you. Had I pleased you I should have pleased no one else. What you say assures me of success. In three months *Il Trovatore* will be sung, and roared, and whistled, and barrel-organed all over Italy." And so it was.

SOCIETY.

THE QUEEN has purchased seven fans of original design, painted on silk, which were included in the late exhibition of students' works at the Female School of Art, Queen's-square.

THERE is to be no Latin play performed by the Queen's scholars at Westminster School this winter, in consequence of the death of the Duke of Albany.

THE QUEEN OF ITALY, attended by her Mistress of the Robes, the Marchesa Villa Marina, on Monday commenced their annual visit to the Roman shops to purchase the many Christmas and New Year's presents which Her Majesty is accustomed to make.

THE COUNTESS DOWAGER OF SEAFIELD has presented a magnificent silver kettle on stand to the Abernethy and Duthill Volunteers to commemorate their supporting the late Earl of Seafeld in forming a guard of honour, on the occasion of the Prince of Wales being at East of Garton in November, 1883.

In memory of the late Viscountess Holmesdale a beautiful window and fine mural tablet of brass has been placed in Linton Church. The three light perpendicular east windows have been filled with stained glass representing the Resurrection of our Lord.

MISS VERA MANNING, niece of the Cardinal, will shortly take the veil. The young devotee, it is said, inherits about £50,000 under her father's will.

THE marriage of Mr. Hardinge-Hay Cameron, Ceylon Civil Service, son of the late Mr. C. Hay Cameron (formerly member of the Supreme Council of Calcutta), with Miss Adeline Blake, daughter of Colonel George Pilkington Blake, of Thurston, Suffolk, took place at St. Peter's Church, Eaton-square, on the 2nd December. The bride was handsomely attired in white satin, the graceful drapery of the tablier being caught with bows of main ribbon, and the train being long and square. She wore a wreath of natural orange-blossoms and a Brussels lace veil. Her jewels included a diamond and pearl cross, the gift of the bridegroom, and diamond brooch and earrings. She carried a large bouquet of carnations, eucharis, and lilies. The bridesmaids looked well in deep cream-coloured muslin cloth, trimmed with coffee lace, and wore of ruby velvet. The two elder ladies wore small bonnets of cream plush, trimmed with ruby velvet, and the four younger ones had large plush hats to match, trimmed with ruby velvet and cream feathers. Each wore a large silver locket, the bridegroom's gift, and carried a bouquet of red and white flowers.

MR. WILFRED CHIFFA, son of the late Mr. William Chiffa, M.P., for Gloucester, was married to the Countess Helen Bismarck, youngest daughter of Count Bismarck of Schlesien (cousin of Prince Bismarck, the German Chancellor), and niece of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, Bart., M.P., on the 2nd December, in the old parish church at Rusdon. The bridesmaids were the Countess Marie Bismarck (the sister of the bride) and Miss Bertha Williams Wynn (cousin). Their dresses were cream Surah, trimmed with violet velvet, bonnets of violet velvet with panicles to match. The bride was conducted to the altar by her father, who afterwards gave her away. The Countess was attired in a bodice of white broché satin and train of plain satin, embroidered with pearls and trimmed with orange-blossoms and myrtle; she wore a bonnet to match, and carried a bouquet of orange-blossoms, myrtle, &c. On returning to Wyndham after the ceremony, the guests were entertained to breakfast in the large hall. The bride and bridegroom left Wyndham in the course of the afternoon by special train to Chester, en route for London. The bride's travelling dress and jacket were of dark blue vigogne, trimmed with velvet, and velvet bonnet to match. The presents were numerous and costly.

STATISTICS.

THE PRICE OF SILK.—The price of silk is said to be now below any which has been touched since the occurrence of the French Revolution in 1848. In a great measure the glut in the English silk market has been due to the enormous imports from China during the present year. For the past eleven months of 1884 the imports of China silk have been 30,698 bales, compared with 12,789 bales in the corresponding period of 1883.

THE BRITISH mercantile marine is composed of some 21,500 vessels, including 3,650 steamers, with an aggregate measurement of about 9,200,000 tons, while that of France consists of about 2,900 vessels, including 700 steamers, with an aggregate measurement of 1,055,000 tons. The number of steam-vessels of war, including transports, despatch boats, &c., which are available for the protection of the respective merchant navies, are 337 vessels, with 2,058 guns, for that of England, and 317 vessels, with 1,680 guns, for that of France. It will thus be seen that, whereas the French mercantile marine is protected in the ratio of one ship of one ship-of-war to nine merchantmen, no less than sixty merchantmen are allotted to the care of each British war vessel. In order to place the British merchant navy on an equal footing with that of France as regards man-of-war protection, it would be necessary to add 2,053 vessels to the Royal Navy.

GERMS.

THE highest point outward things can bring unto is the contentment of the mind, with which no estate can be poor; without which all estates would be miserable.

A MAN that loves his own freedom and can govern his house without falling by the ears with his neighbours, or engaging in lawsuits, is as free as a duke of Venice.

THE beauty of the face is a frail possession, a short lived flower, only attached to the mere epidermis, but that of the mind is innate and unchangeable.

Much depends upon a man's courage when he is slandered and traduced. Weak men are crushed by detraction; but the brave hold on and succeed.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

NEW COLLEGE PUDDINGS.—Grate the crumbs of a two penny loaf, shred suet 8oz. and mix with 8oz. of currants, one of citron mixed fine, one of orange, a handful of sugar, half a nutmeg, three eggs beaten, yolk and white separately. Mix, and make into the shape and size of a goose-egg. Put half a pound of butter into a frying-pan; and when melted and quite hot, stew them gently in it over a stove; turn them two or three times till of a fine light brown. Mix a glass of brandy with the butter. Serve with pudding sauce.

ROAST TURKEY.—2lbs. of sausage meat, 1lb. of fat bacon very finely chopped, 1lb. of truffles washed and brushed perfectly clean and finely chopped, 20 chestnuts grated, 10 shallots finely chopped, 3oz. of sultana raisins also chopped finely, 1 nutmeg grated, a teaspoonful of mixed spice, the rind of two lemons grated, half the juice of one, pepper and salt to taste. Mix the ingredients all well together; warm the mixture in the oven, and stuff the turkey with it twenty-four hours before roasting. When the turkey is set to roast, let it be covered with buttered paper until within half an hour of its being done. Baste it continually with butter and lemon juice. When the paper is removed sprinkle a little flour over the bird, and continue the basting. Before a good fire a fine turkey will take from two to two and a half hours to be properly done.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LET a man learn to look for the permanent in the mutable and fleeting; let him learn to bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence, without losing his reverence; let him learn that, though abyss open under abyss, and opinion displace opinion, all are at last contained in the eternal canals.

AN OLD ARAB CITY.—Arriving at Algiers by rail, a traveller naturally feels a sense of disappointment, as if he were come upon a modern French town with its streets, large warehouses, colonnades and gay shop-windows. This is modern Algiers; and it lies along the borders of the sea for a distance of two miles or more, and on the rising hillsides, three or four blocks upward. High above the French buildings, and directly back of them, rises what is left of the old Arab city. The houses, white as an advanced knowledge of the art of whitewashing can make them, are irregularly piled together, like a huge mass of rock candy. A flight of five hundred steps leads to the Kasbah, or fort, that surmounts the height; and many other streets and lanes, dark, narrow, and circuitous, lead to the same point, giving the old town a triangular shape. Scattered over the hills on either side of the city one sees a large number of villas; those belonging to the French and the rich Hebrews are more to the left of the town, while to the right live a large number of English, who occupy a tract of land extending three or four miles beyond Algiers. The impression of the place is much grander when one approaches it by water; its fine harbour, with the forts, lighthouse and arsenal, the rising mass of buildings of dazzling whiteness, terminating in the grand old fort on the summit, and the Moorish villas which surround the bay, half concealed by the luxuriance of the foliage, make Algiers one of the most beautiful of cities. The climate is absolute perfection, neither hot nor cold, but allowing one always to sit with open windows. The seasons are not marked by the budding of trees and the putting forth of flowers, for this is going on throughout the year.

CANDLES.—Candles denote both a low and a high state of society. The early Greeks and Romans burned candles made of wax and tallow. These were of a very primitive kind, consisting of oakum wicks and of the pith of bulrushes, dipped into liquid wax or tallow. But these gave way to the handier lamp, whether of terra cotta or of bronze. In a country abounding in olive and other vegetable oils, this was the easier way. In England the supply was, as indicated, from an animal source. Then a time came, especially in England, when lamps, except for the wealthy, went out of use, and candles were mostly used. Now, far more lamps are used than at the end of the last century. Before the introduction of petroleum into England, candles in the country and in the city were used, either by the very poor or the very rich. The Queen has never given a drawing-room reception where either lamplight or gaslight was used; only wax-lights must shine. No British nobleman invites his guests to a ball where the illumination is by anything else than by expensive wax-candles; by the latter are meant either those made from wax, as we commonly understand it, or from the finest spermaceti. On the altars in churches none but lights made from vegetable wax and vegetable oil are ever used. It is said the reason why wax candles are thus used in the drawing-rooms of royalty and the nobility, is that ladies appear to better advantage with such a light, and also that it is better for their complexion than gas. In the obscure places of the kingdom the poor, however, have no thought of their complexion; but as, centuries ago, their ancestors thought only of economy, so does the modern British labourer, who, in some rural districts, still uses the dipped tallow candle.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. W. B.—The lady is not in the position you name.
W. R. S.—The action of the drug mentioned is that of an absorbent.

R. C. F.—The two chemicals used are tartaric acid and bicarbonate of soda.

L. E. W.—No man is entitled by the laws of England to take the steps you suggest. Consult a respectable solicitor.

C. R. V. W.—We have no sympathy with your friend's ideas. It is better to avoid quarrels on every possible occasion.

A. R. G.—Oysters fried in oil are said to be far better than those fried in lard, butter, or drippings, but there is everything in the quality of the oil used.

A. M. C.—The cough may easily be allayed, but as a rule it is not right to stop it. There is generally something which produces the cough that must first be attended to. Consult a respectable medical man.

"MIRA J.—If the young man offers no explanation of his behaviour cease to accept his company, and let him feel that you are sufficiently young and independent to live without his attentions. So invite other friends to visit you. This will bring him to his senses.

R. H. D.—1. A blonde is a person of very fair complexion, with light hair and light blue eyes. You are certainly not a blonde, nor is your sister. 2. The blonde unquestionably. 3. There are dyes that will colour the hair black, but we advise you to let them alone. 4. Try outdoor exercise. 5. Both are defective. You should study and practice daily. 6. The Rose. It has been called the "ornament of the earth, the glory of the plants, the eye of the flowers, and the blush of the meadow."

H. E.—1. We have no personal knowledge of the concern referred to. 2. A bay is an inlet of the sea, usually smaller than a gulf, but of the same general character. A bay has also been described as a portion of the sea which is wider at the part nearest the open sea, and narrower as it recedes inland. A gulf is defined as a recess in the ocean, from the general line of the shore into the land, or a tract of water extending from the ocean or sea into the land, between two points or promontories.

M. B. C.—"Father of Waters" is the popular name given to the River Mississippi, on account of its great length (3,100 miles), and the very large number of its tributaries, of which the Red, the Arkansas, the Ohio, the Missouri, the Illinois, the Des Moines, the Wisconsin, and the St. Peter's or Minnesota, are the most important. The literal signification of the name, which is of Indian origin, is said to be "Great River."

M. T. W.—The mosque of St. Sophia, in Constantinople, is built of light bricks, but throughout lined with coloured marble. The ground plan of the edifice has the form of a cross, 850 feet long and 236 wide; the diameter of the dome measures 107 feet; the height from the ground to the cupola is 180 feet. The ceiling and the arches between the columns are inlaid with beautiful mosaic work and gilt; the gallery, 50 feet broad, is sustained by 67 columns, some of which are said to have been taken from the celebrated temple of Diana at Ephesus.

C. A.—1. Constantinople is supplied with water by two aqueducts. The ancient cistern constructed under Justinian is still used as a reservoir. Its roof rests upon 386 marble columns. 2. Melrose Abbey is the celebrated ruin in the town of Melrose, Scotland, ranking among the most perfect ecclesiastical structures of Gothic architecture; but it has in later times been despoiled of a great deal of the material which made it so attractive, and the church is now the only part of the monastery remaining. The scene of Scott's novel of "The Monastery" is laid at Melrose Abbey, in the sixteenth century. 3. Ehrenfels is a ruined castle of the thirteenth century, near Bingen on the Rhine.

JANE.—A good authority says that quiet eyes, which impress and embarrass one with their repose, signify not only self-command, but also much complacency and some conceit. Restless eyes that cannot look one steadily in the face denote a doubtful, designing mind. Eyes in which the white has a yellowish tinge and is streaked with reddish veins indicate strong passion and hasty temper. Very blue eyes bespeak a mind inclined to coquetry. Grey eyes signify dignity, intelligence, and excellent reasoning faculties; greenish eyes falsehood and a fondness for scandal. A malicious mind is often indicated by greenish eyes. Black eyes show a passionate, lively temperament, and often a most deceitful disposition.

R. Y. T.—The most noted lighthouse in the world for size and antiquity was the Pharos of Alexandria. This building was the frustum of a square pyramid surrounded by a large base, the precise dimensions of which are not known. It was commenced by the first Ptolemy, and was finished about 280 B.C. The style and workmanship are represented to have been superb, and the material was white stone. The height was about 400 feet; and it is stated by Josephus that the light, which was always kept burning in its top at night, was visible about forty-one miles. It was probably destroyed by an earthquake, but the date of its destruction is not known. Enough is known, however, to make it certain that this tower existed for sixteen hundred years. The island upon which it was situated was named Pharos, and the structure took its name from its site. To this day the French word for lighthouse is *phare*, and the Italian and Spanish *faro*.

A. C.—There is not very much cause for complaint. You have done your best. The best can do no more.

F. C. C.—The translation of the French aphorism is that it is "opportunity as a rule which makes a thief."

L. C. B.—Gas is obtained from what is called the "distillation of coal."

C. P. R.—The name George means a "husbandman," Alice, a "princess."

W. S. K.—Be careful not to offend the person you mention.

K. C. W.—There is no society which gives the benefits described without payment.

W. C. B.—There is no object in retaining the purse. You had better return it, and not take any notice of the complaint.

L. L. G.—Can you not argue with your relative, so as to bring about a settlement of the affair? It would be a great pity to keep matters in the same condition in which they stand at present.

E. R. W.—The lines you quote are by Lord Byron, and occur in what has been called "Chapter of Sweets."

"'Tis sweet to hear the watchdog's honest bark,
Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home."

R. V. E.—Many chances have been given with respect to the alterations of the existing relations between man and wife; but we cannot enter into them in this column. It seems to us that you had better cultivate domestic peace rather than attempt to stir up strife.

THE LESSON OF THE PART.

"Oh, if we could forget!" he said,
Whose life was full of mispent hours,
"If we could hide it with the dead
Who sleep beneath the grass and flowers."

"Forget!" cried she whose heart was brave
To face the work she had to do,
"If you could hide in one low grave
The dead days that so trouble you."

"Then days to come would squander be.
Look back with serious, thoughtful eyes,
Oh, friend of mine, and what you see
May help to make you strong and wise."

"Learn from the lesson of the past—
The days wherein no good was done,
That time God gives us flies so fast!
So soon the race of life is run!"

"Let thoughts of what remained undone
Rouse up your heart to work to-day,
And courage, born of victories won,
Will baffle lions in the way."

"Be diligent to-day, and so
Atone for a life in days gone by,
And coax the flower of peace to grow
Between the dead past and the sky."

E. E. B.

R. M. E.—Think very little of the young man. He seems to be what is called a general lover, and they are as a rule not at all desirable acquaintances.

K. C. C.—Mr. Gladstone was born on the 29th of December, 1809, and was therefore seventy-five years of age in December, 1884.

A. W. F.—The difficulty of ascending the Nile has been recognised from the earliest ages, but modern science doubtless will overcome them.

L. M. A.—The abbreviation S. T. P. means as a rule in classical works "Sanctæ Theologiæ Professor, or Professor of Holy Theology."

K. L. G.—Learn to practise a little patience. Your beau probably has become a little tired of paying regular court to you, which is quite natural among boys and girls. You are too young to be thinking seriously of love and matrimony.

MAGGIE.—Many have argued in a similar manner that have not experienced the difficulties, trials, and misfortunes attendant upon such a position. These have, it is true, in some instances been overcome, and a thoroughly happy future established, but it is not the rule, but the exception.

F. F.—The history of the Moravians extends as far back as the ninth century, when Christianity was introduced into Bohemia and Moravia by Cyril and Methodius, who gave the people a Slavic version of the Bible, and built up a national church. In 1749 the British Parliament acknowledged the Moravian Brethren as an Episcopal church, and passed an Act encouraging them to settle in the North American colonies, where they devoted themselves to missions among the Indians with great success. The Moravians are an Evangelical church, in the fullest sense of the term, as it is commonly used in the United States. The distinguishing feature of Moravian theology is the prominence given to the person and atonement of Christ. There are seventeen bishops in office at present. Of these, six reside in Germany, four in England, six in the United States, and one in the West Indies. The ritual of the church is similar to that of the Protestant Episcopal. Although the church is small it is engaged in very extensive operations.

T. W. W.—There is no law to prevent a man from marrying his first wife's brother's cousin.

A. A. W.—Do not strive to excel in a pursuit for which you have no taste. It would be only throwing away time.

A. M. B.—The proper way is simply to offer your arm to a lady. She can take it or not as she pleases. She may wish to be free to manage her dress.

E. W. S.—There is no likelihood of your being able to retain the post; therefore you had better make other arrangements.

A SON OF MARR.—1. The population of Birmingham is 400,774; that of Manchester, 341,414, and Salford, 176,235. 2. Write to the editor of a sporting paper.

L. M. N.—If you love this gentleman, and think that he will make you a good husband, why not marry him? We advise you to do so.

S. C. W.—We think this very silly business, and that the young man who initiated the proceeding deserves to be jilted.

A. W. F.—The young lady may give you a chance for an explanation. Do not be impatient. Do not return the presents until you are reconciled to the young lady, and she is willing to receive them.

W. R. C.—You are too young to receive attentions from gentlemen with a view to matrimony. You had better be governed in this matter by the advice of your parents.

W. R.—You are probably not regarded by the young lady as a beau. She looks upon you as too young. Do not take the affair too seriously. If you are patient you may yet win her.

C. W. F.—Let this gentleman try to get acquainted with you in a proper way. It is not discreet for a young lady to manifest a great desire for the acquaintance of a stranger.

R. T. F.—We advise you to spend the money improving yourself in some practical knowledge that will help you to get a living. Study accounts, book-keeping, penmanship, and tables of weights, measures, and values.

W. W.—Before endeavouring to attract the gentleman, you had better wait for him to manifest some interest in you. Any other course will be likely to repel him. It is the part of the gentlemen to woo and the ladies to be wooed.

C. R. A.—An engine said to be the smallest in the world has been, it is said, made by a watchmaker now connected with a watch manufacturing company. As described, the engine is of upright pattern, and is made of steel and gold. It rests on a small coin, and can be worked either by steam or compressed air. The cylinder is a little less than one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter, with a little less than three-thirty-seconds of an inch stroke. The balance wheel is one-third of an inch in diameter, and can make something like a thousand revolutions a minute. The wrist-pin is a sapphire out for the purpose.

E. C. C.—There can, we think, be no reasonable doubt that the first year of the Christian era was the year 1. It was not 0; it was most certainly 1, just as the twelve months ensuing upon a charter is the first year of its age. The first century, then, beginning with 1, must have terminated with the year 100—not with 99, for that would have made it consist of one year too little. The second century accordingly began with 101, and ended with 200. The third, in like manner, began with 201, and ended with 300. And so on till we come to the eighteenth, which began with 1701, and ended with 1800. Consequently, the year 1800 was a part of the eighteenth century, and such we have always heard it called by intelligent and reflecting persons. At twelve o'clock midnight, on the 31st of December, 1800, the eighteenth century terminated, and the 1st of January, 1801, which immediately followed, was the commencement of the nineteenth century. The mere circumstance of the figure 8 being employed in the year 1800, while 7 is employed in other years of the eighteenth century, does nothing to affect the case. Yet this is what alone has occasioned and gives countenance to the supposition that 1800 belongs to the present century. Individuals who think so should be asked to look beyond the external appearance of things.

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